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TOM TOPP; OR, FIGHTING AGAINST FIENDS. By ALLYN DRAPER.



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TOM TOPP:

OR,

FIGHTING AGAINST FIENDS.

A ROMANCE OF INDIA.

By ALLYN DRAPER.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS MURDER—TOM IN TROUBLE.

A GHASTLY sight met the eyes of the janitor of No. 37 1-2 Whitehall street, when he opened the office of Robert Topp, ship broker, early on the morning of December the 15th, 1856.

The walls and furniture were spattered with blood, and on the floor, in a pool of the same crimson fluid, lay the corpse of Mr. Topp, with his head crushed and battered until it scarcely retained a semblance of humanity.

His watch and pocketbook were missing, and one of the two safes in the office had been rifled of its valuable contents. The other safe stood open, but it contained nothing but books and papers, which had apparently not been disturbed.

A heavy iron belaying pin, with which the deed had evidently been committed, lay by the side of the wounded man, and a piece of tarred rope hanging from the open window into the street indicated how the assassin made his escape from the building.

The belaying pin and the tarred rope created the belief that the murderer was a sailor, but this clue was too faint to enable the detectives to trace out the guilty man, and they finally abandoned the attempt.

About half past two o'clock on the night of the murder, a stout, one-eyed man, with a bronzed face, paused in front of a high-stoop house on West 12th street.

After glancing around cautiously, he threw some pebbles against the closed shutter of a window on the first floor, and then ascended the steps.

The signal had evidently been expected, for the front door was at once opened, and closed as soon as the stout man stepped into the dark hallway.

The person who admitted him, a tall, slender man, led the way into a room where the light was burning, and locked the door behind him.

A tray, containing a bottle of brandy, and glasses, sat on the table, and before a word was exchanged, the new comer poured out nearly a tumblerful of the fiery fluid and gulped it down.

"Well?" said the tall man in a questioning tone.

"O. K.," responded the other.

"Did you do it?"

"Yes."

"Is he dead?"

"As a door-nail."

"Where are the papers?"

"Here they are," replied the stout man, drawing a package from his overcoat pocket, and laying it on the table.

The tall man seized the bundle eagerly, and commenced to open it, but the marks of bloody fingers on the wrapper caught his eye, causing him to turn pale and hastily swallow some brandy.

Then opening the package, he looked over the papers, drew a long sigh of relief, and said:

"All right."

"Well, down with the brads," replied the one-eyed man; "I want to be off."

"Didn't you find enough in the safe to satisfy you?"

"Not much. A bargain is a bargain. I was to have all I found and two thousand beside."

"Are you certain that he is done for?"

"Dead sure."

"Well, there's the money. I'll give you as much more to put the boy out of the way."

"No. I had a grudge against the old man, but I'll not harm the brat without he becomes dangerous: then, of course—" and he drew his hand across his throat significantly.

"Let him alone, then. I'll find a safer way to draw his teeth."

"Now I'll be off," said the stout man, thrusting the bank-notes which were handed him into his pockets.

"You will leave the city?"

"By the first train."

"Good-night, then."

"So long," and issuing from the house, the one-eyed man strode away in the darkness.

The other man, after closing the front door, returned to the room, locked the papers in a safe, extinguished the light, and retired.

Mr. Topp was a widower, and at the time of his death, Tom, his only child, a youth of eighteen years, was a student at Princeton, New Jersey.

On being notified of his father's death, Tom Topp at once returned to New York.

His father was already robed for the grave and placed in his coffin.

Entering the room where the body was lying, Tom requested that he be left alone.

His grief was too deep for tears. Long he stood and gazed with dry, aching eyes on the disfigured face of him who had been one of the best and kindest of parents.

Then throwing himself on his knees beside the coffin, and placing one hand on his father's breast, Tom raised the other toward Heaven, and made a solemn vow to avenge his death.

The next morning Mr. Topp was buried.

Tom's uncle, William Alston, had given the necessary orders for the funeral, and taken possession of Mr. Topp's books and papers.

Tom was astonished at this, for his father and William Alston had for many years been bitter enemies, and it was only recently that that they had treated each other with ordinary civility.

However, Tom made no objection to his uncle winding up his father's affairs, for William Alston was a lawyer in good standing, though he had, on more than one occasion, been accused of sharp practice.

Mr. Topp did not own any real estate, but he was supposed to have a considerable sum in stock and bonds; therefore Tom was very much surprised when his uncle showed him a statement proving that his father's liabilities were greater than his assets.

This fact William Alston accounted for by saying that nearly everything of value had been carried off by Mr. Topp's murderer.

Though Tom felt confident that he was swindled, he did not know how he could prove it. So he kept his suspicions to himself, determining to sift the matter to the bottom at some future day.

Tom's principal regret about his want of funds was that it prevented him from at once devoting himself to hunting down his father's murderer.

However, he was not a boy to yield to despondency, but determined to go to work without delay and provide himself with money.

With the assistance of his uncle, he got a situation with Moses Levy, dealer in ships' supplies, and immediately entered upon the discharge of his duties.

Just before dark, one afternoon, two weeks afterwards, a policeman entered the store of his employer, which was on South street.

"Goot-evenin', cap'n, vat can I do ver you?" said Levy, rubbing his hands together and bowing obsequiously.

Satisfying himself by a quick glance that no one else was in ear-shot, the officer in a low tone inquired:

"What is the name of that tall young fellow that works for you?"

"Dot is Tom Topp."

"Where is he? I want to see him."

"In der pack room eatin' his dinner; I vill call him."

"I'll save you the trouble," said the officer, brushing by Levy and walking to a room at the back of the store which he entered without ceremony.

The dirty, ship-shod wife of Levy was engaged in cooking something on the stove, and

Tom Topp was seated at the table hungrily devouring a scanty supply of food.

"I want you, my kid," said the officer, laying his hand on the latter's shoulder.

"Want me? what for?" asked Tom, who was not only tall but well-developed, rising and confronting the officer.

"For sluming."

"I don't understand you."

"Shoving queer."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Of course not. Well, since you are so innocent, I want you for passing counterfeit money."

"Me! I never had anything to do with counterfeit money."

"You passed a counterfeit five at Marvin's store this morning and the same kind of a bill at Sandel's cigar store yesterday."

"Mr. Levy sent me out to get the bills changed, and told me if I had any trouble in doing so to buy some small articles for myself."

"S'help me God, cap'n," protested Levy, "I never giff him a bill to be changed, and my wife knowsh it. All the monish which I gets is in small change."

"It is a lie! You did give me the bills!" said Tom, so fiercely that Levy shrank behind the policeman, who produced a pair of handcuffs and said:

"Show your whids, my covey, and put out your mauleys for the ruffles."

Tom did not understand the officer's slang, but he knew what the handcuffs were, and he drew back, exclaiming:

"I won't be ironed!"

"You won't, eh?" sneered the policeman, rushing at him with uplifted club.

Leaping nimbly to one side, Tom avoided the descending club, and struck the officer a stunning blow under the ear.

Down went the blue-coated guardian of the law, falling over the stove, which he overturned, and received a pot of boiling stew on his head and neck, while on top of him fell the stove-pipe with a tremendous clatter, filling the room with a cloud of soot and smoke.

"Fire! murder! water!" he yelled, leaping to his feet, capering about like a madman and frantically tearing off his clothes.

It was a ludicrous sight, but Tom did not stay to see the show. As soon as he struck the blow he turned and darted through the store toward the street.

CHAPTER II.

A HOT CHASE—DRIVEN TO DESPERATION.

BUT Tom was not destined to escape so easily, for when he jumped out of the store on the sidewalk he found himself almost in the arms of a fussy policeman, who had been left to guard the door.

Tom saw at a glance that if he attempted to turn to either side, or checked his speed, he would be seized, so lowering his head he rushed full tilt on the officer, struck him in the stomach, knocked the breath out of him and sent him sprawling in the gutter.

"Hi! you, stop there!" shouted a roundsman, who happened to be near at hand and witnessed the performance.

Without paying any attention to the order, Tom took to his heels.

The roundsman fired a shot which whistled dangerously near to the fugitive's head, and gave chase.

The fat policeman scrambled out of the gutter and went puffing along in the rear.

Darting around the corner, Tom ran up De Peyster street, with the officers in hot pursuit.

Away they went up De Peyster street to Front, down Front to Fletcher, up Fletcher to Pearl and down Pearl to Fulton.

Tom had gradually been drawing away from his pursuers, and when he reached Fulton street he slackened his pace to a quick walk, and mingled in the crowd hurrying towards the ferry.

This maneuver would probably have enabled him to escape had it not been for one unfortunate circumstance.

He did not have his hat with him.

This fact was of course noticed by the policemen, so on reaching the corner of Fulton street and finding that Tom was likely to give them the slip, they shouted:

"Stop thief! Stop that bare-headed boy!"

This at once directed attention to Tom, and an officious dandy seized him by the collar and cried out:

"Here he is—I've caught him!"

But it didn't take more than a second to convince the dandy that he had "caught a Tartar," for he received a stinger between the eyes that made him see stars, and assume a sitting position on the sidewalk with a suddenness which was far from pleasant.

On releasing himself from his would-be captor, Tom darted across the street through the thick stream of slow-moving vehicles, ran down past Fulton street, and turned up along the river front.

For a few moments after turning the corner of the market, Tom thought he had thrown his pursuers off his track.

But he soon found that they were after him, and were re-enforced by two more policemen and a crowd of men and boys.

Tom ran like a deer for a few hundred yards, then trusting to the gathering gloom to conceal his movements, turned abruptly out upon which was a large quantity of lumber.

Threading his way between the piles of planks, he crouched down between some of them near the end of the pier, and listened, hoping his pursuers would pass on.

They would have done so, but a loafer, who wished to curry favor with the officers, told them where Tom had gone.

Stationing themselves so as to prevent his escape, the policemen sent one of their number for a lantern, and when he returned, began to search the pier foot to foot.

Crouched between the piles of plank like a hare in its form, Tom heard the officers and the crowd of men and boys gradually approaching him.

He knew that if he made any resistance he would be brutally clubbed, or perhaps shot down like a dog, and if he surrendered, there seemed to be no chance for him to escape a felon's cell.

Conscious of his innocence, but driven to desperation, Tom determined to perish, rather than be captured.

While his pursuers were a few yards distant, he started up from his place of concealment and rushed to the end of the pier.

The officer carrying the lantern instantly turned the light of the bull's eye upon him.

"Surrender!" shouted the policemen, covering him with their pistols.

"Never!" he cried, "death before disgrace!" and he plunged into the dark, surging river.

Down he went like a plummet, and when the officers reached the end of the pier, the only trace they saw of Tom Topp was some bubbles, which were borne swiftly away by the rushing tide.

The lantern was held over the water, and the awe-struck crowd peered anxiously into the river for several minutes, but nothing came to the surface.

"Drowned!" exclaimed one of the officers. "He was a desperate young villain," said the policeman who was butted off the sidewalk.

"Yes," assented the roundsman, as they left the pier, "and game to the backbone."

But Tom was not drowned.

When he jumped into the river he intended to make away with himself, but the cold water brought him to his senses, and he began to strike out lustily.

He soon came to the surface of the water, but before he did so, the tide, which was running out, swept him past the end of the pier next to the one from which he jumped, and beyond the space illuminated by the lantern, so he was not discovered by the officers.

Encumbered by his clothing, and chilled by the water, which was of icy coldness, Tom found it no easy task to keep himself afloat, but he determined to drown rather than call for help while within hearing distance of the officers.

After drifting with the tide for three or four hundred yards, he took the cramp.

Sharp racking pains shot through his limbs, rendering him unable to sustain himself, and he barely had time to cry "Help!" before he sank.

Down—down he went until he thought that he would never come up again, but his spasmodic struggles brought him to the surface.

"Help!" he shouted, and then went under again.

As he sank there was a roaring noise in his ears, a feeling of terrible oppression about his chest, and it seemed to him as if his head would burst open.

His cries attracted the attention of Phil Fitzgerald, a stout Irish lad, who was on the

deck of the ship Comet, which lay in the slip near by.

"Be jabbers!" said Phil, running to the stern of the vessel and peering into the river, "sure, an' there must be one in ther wather, I'm thinkin'!"

Once more Tom came to the surface, uttered a half strangled cry, and commenced to sink for the third and last time.

Phil saw him, and shouting: "Man overboard!" took a header into the river.

He came up close to Tom, who immediately seized hold of him with the desperate grasp of a drowning man.

"Hould on!" yelled Phil; "it's let go I mane, or ye'll drown both av us."

But Tom was too far gone to understand, and clung to his would-be preserver like grim death.

"Take that, thin," said Phil, striking him a severe blow on the side of the head.

The lick partially stunned Tom, and he released his hold.

"Now yer sinsible," said Phil, catching him by the hair and supporting his head above water.

Phil's cry of man overboard caused the crew of the Comet to come tumbling up on deck. They speedily lowered a boat, and in a few minutes the two boys were rescued and hoisted on board of the vessel.

Phil was none the worse for his cold bath, but Tom was so weak he could scarcely stand.

The kind-hearted sailors took him into the forecabin, stripped off his wet clothes, put him in a bunk and gave him a strong drink of brandy, and in a few minutes he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER III.

STRUCK BY LIGHTNING—HIS FATHER'S WATCH—IN DEADLY PERIL.

TOM slept a greater part of the night, and next morning felt almost as well as ever.

After he had eaten breakfast, he was told that the captain had come on board, and wished to see him.

Preceded by Phil, he went to the cabin, where he found the captain.

Captain Helm was a regular salt, shrewd and blunt, but kindly in his feelings, and his face won Tom's confidence at once.

In response to the captain's inquiries, he told who he was, and related the circumstances that caused him to throw himself into the river.

Captain Helm listened to the narrative attentively, and when it was finished, said:

"You have an honest face, and I believe your story, and all the more readily because I know Moses Levy to be one of the greatest rascals unhung. What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Tom. "I want to get away from New York."

"Have you ever been to sea?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you are a stout, active-looking lad, and if you like, I will engage you as a green hand."

"Will you go away from here soon?"

"Our cargo is on board, and the Comet sails this afternoon for Calcutta, India."

Tom jumped at the offer, and the captain sent ashore and bought him a chest and outfit of sailor's clothes, which were to be paid for out of his wages.

He was told to keep below until the ship was out of port, so Tom did not go on deck until the Comet had passed the light-ship off Sandy Hook, and was standing out to sea.

Almost immediately after going on deck, Tom met the first mate, John Croley, a stout, one-eyed man, who, with a portion of the crew, came on board just before the vessel sailed.

When he saw Tom, Croley's swarthy face turned pale, and he started back as if he had received an electric shock.

But quickly recovering himself he seized Tom by the shoulder roughly, and in a harsh voice asked:

"Who are you?"

"Tom Topp."

"What are you doing on board?"

"I've shipped for the voyage."

"How did that happen? Our crew was made up three days ago."

"I came on board by accident, and the captain engaged me."

During this conversation, Croley had kept his solitary eye fixed on Tom, as if he would read his very soul.

Then, as if suddenly recollecting something,

he turned away abruptly, and descended to his cabin.

After securing the door behind him, he took from his pocket a handsome gold watch, and locked it up in his chest.

"Confound the brat," he muttered. "I wonder if he suspects me? I'll keep my eye on him, and if I see anything suspicious, overboard he goes."

After forming this resolution, Croley swallowed a glass of rum, returned to the deck, and resumed his duties.

In the meantime, Tom spoke to Phil Fitzgerald about the strange conduct of the mate.

"Oh, he's gettin' over a spree, I'm thinkin'," replied Phil; "nearly every wan of the men that came wid him were dhrunk."

This explanation seemed reasonable to Tom, and he would have dismissed the matter from his mind, if he had not observed that Croley was continually watching him.

To this, however, Tom soon became accustomed, and did not worry himself about it, though he could not help thinking it was very odd.

The voyage across the Atlantic was uneventful.

Tom was always ready to make himself useful, and got along smoothly with both officers and men.

He and Phil Fitzgerald became great chums and when off duty were seldom apart.

The Comet, when doubling the Cape of Good Hope, did not encounter the usual gale, without which it seems impossible to get into the Indian Ocean, and all hands congratulated themselves on the prospect of a safe trip.

But they were doomed to furnish another illustration of the old saying, that:

"There is many a slip
Between the cup and the lip."

One afternoon when they were within two days' sail of the mouth of the River Hoogly, a black cloud arose out of the sea in the southwest, spreading until it covered the horizon in that quarter.

Higher and higher it ascended, until at sunset the heavens were covered with an inky pall, and the darkness was intense.

Sail was taken in until the Comet lay under a single reefed foretopsail, waiting for the impending storm.

All hands were on deck, and the hatches were put on and battened down.

The wind died away, until not a breath of air was perceptible, and except a low moaning sound that crept over the sea, all was still.

Then there was a puff of air, followed by a louder blast, a vivid flash of lightning, an appalling peal of thunder, and the storm burst forth.

The ship stood almost on end for a moment when the gale struck her, and then forged ahead with her prow buried in the mountain seas.

The gale increased in violence for several hours, and then there was a lull, but it did not continue long.

There was a crash of thunder, a flash of lightning which struck the mainmast, shivered it to pieces, and killed two sailors who were standing near it.

At the same time, the wind shifted to the opposite quarter from which it had been blowing, and blew with greater violence than before.

The sails were caught aback, and the ship thrown on her beam ends.

The mizzen-mast was cut away, and the vessel righted to an even keel, but being deprived of the steady power of the masts, she rolled and tossed about fearfully.

Fortunately, however, the gale began to moderate, and by morning there was only a gentle breeze, though the sea was yet quite rough.

The men were ordered to get their breakfasts, and then go to work rigging jury masts.

But when the hatches were removed a dense cloud of smoke poured out of them, and they were at once replaced.

The lightning which struck the mainmast had passed down through the deck and set the vessel on fire.

A hole was cut in the deck, and an attempt made to extinguish the fire by pouring in water with the few buckets that were available.

But it soon became evident that the flames had made too much headway to be checked in this way.

When this fact became known a scene of

the wildest confusion ensued, for nearly every one was panic-stricken.

And indeed the position of those on board seemed almost hopeless.

Nearly every movable object on deck, including one of the boats, had been torn from their lashings and swept overboard.

At the height of the storm a heavy sea came crashing on deck, and crushed one of the other boats to pieces, so there was only one left in a serviceable condition, and it was not large enough to hold more than half of the crew.

But what made the position of those on board peculiarly appalling was the fact that there was in the cargo at least ten tons of gunpowder, for which it was supposed there would be a ready sale at Calcutta, as the Sepoy rebellion had recently broken out.

The firm demeanor and energetic language of the captain at length restored some kind of order among the crew.

The boat was lowered, and the first mate, with some of the men, directed to keep the others from crowding into it.

Captain Helm then called for volunteers to try and get some water, provisions and material for making a raft.

Tom, Phil, and about half of the crew promptly stepped forward and offered themselves for the hazardous undertaking.

"Bring up the first things you can find that will float, or that is fit to eat or drink," said the captain.

Then the hatches were removed, and the men, led by Captain Helm, rushed down the companionway through the blinding smoke.

The smoke was so dense and suffocating that no one could remain below long, and in a few minutes all hands came hurrying up the companion ladder with such articles as came readiest to hand.

When they reached the deck they found it empty. Croley and the rest of the crew had disappeared.

With one accord every one rushed to the side of the vessel, and saw the mate and missing men rowing away in the boat.

In their eagerness to escape, they had baselessly abandoned their comrades to their fate.

In vain those left on the Comet alternately begged and ordered them to return; Croley and those with him were deaf alike to threats and entreaties.

Steadily the oars were plied, and the distance increased between the boat and the vessel.

There was no time to make a raft of the scanty supply of material available, for the flames now began to shoot up out of the hatchways.

Every moment spent on board was fraught with deadly peril, as the powder might catch afire at any instant, and blow the ship to atoms.

Some of the young men on the doomed vessel leaped into the sea with whatever would keep them afloat, though they scarcely hoped to prolong their lives more than a few hours.

But a greater part of the abandoned men, yielding to despair, ran to and fro like madmen, or jumped overboard, and sought a speedy death beneath the waves.

Captain Helm, Tom and Phil lowered a part of the shattered mainmast into the water, and the captain descended to it, telling the two boys to follow him.

They were about to do so, when Tom noticed a chest, which some of the men had brought on deck, and said:

"Let us throw this overboard, and lash it to the mast; it may do some good."

"All right," replied Phil, taking hold of one of the handles of the chest, "but it will be afther sinking, it's hivy as lead."

"We must empty it then."

Whereupon they broke open the chest, and turned its contents out on the deck.

As they did so the glitter of a gold watch caught Tom's eye, and he picked it up.

His heart leaped into his mouth, and he exclaimed:

"Great God! this is my father's watch. Whose chest is this?"

"Sure, an' it's ther mate's," replied Phil. "Hare's the name, John Croley, made wid brass tacks on ther ind av it."

"Make haste, boys," cried the captain, "what are you stopping for?"

"Come away wid you now, Tom," said Phil, pitching the chest overboard to the captain and sliding down the rope to where he was.

But Tom, heedless of the hell of fire raging below his feet and the danger of being instantly blown into eternity, ran to the side of the vessel toward the boat, and holding up the watch in his hand, shouted:

"Where did you get this watch?"

Croley stood up in the boat, and shaking his clenched fist at Tom yelled back:

"Darn you, ask the fishes, you will soon be with them."

"Overboard with you! jump for your life!" shrieked the captain, as a dense column of black smoke shot up from the center of the ship.

CHAPTER IV.

BLOWING UP OF THE COMET—AFLOAT ON A RAFT.

WHEN Tom Topp heard Captain Helm halloo to jump for his life he thrust the watch into his pocket and plunged into the sea.

The impetus of his descent carried him below the surface of the water, and when he came up he could see nothing of the captain and Phil.

The piece of mast and the chest were floating a few yards from him, and he struck out towards them, wondering what had become of his friends.

The next moment their heads emerged from the water close to the mast, and he soon joined them.

"We thought the ship was about to blow up, and we dived," explained the captain.

"Do you think that would do any good?" asked Tom.

"Perhaps not if she blows up close to us, but it is our only chance, so if you see any sign of an explosion, under with you, and stay down as long as possible."

But the vessel did not blow up immediately.

The dense column of smoke which arose into the air and alarmed the captain just before Tom jumped overboard was caused by the fire burning through the upper deck, and thus getting free vent.

But the captain and the rest of those who were in the water knew that there would soon be an explosion, and they gazed with terror at the dark hull which was pitching and tossing on the waves so close to them.

The helm had been lashed before the vessel was abandoned, and she kept on her way.

But to the imperiled men she seemed scarcely to move; before many minutes had passed, however, the vessel was at least a hundred yards away.

The Comet was now one wide blaze.

Sheets of flames flashed along her sides and shot up above her—the spectacle was grand but terrible.

All at once the men in the water sent up a cry of dismay.

The small piece of canvas which had been stretched from the stump of the mizzen mast to a spar at the break of the poop to keep the ship to the wind, was consumed by the fire, and the rope used to lash the helm was burned in two.

The Comet being thus deprived of sail, and the rudder ceasing to act, yielded to a current which drifted her back towards those who were struggling in the sea.

Rolling and tossing about, the flaming ship bore down on the helpless men like a fiery monster bent on destroying them.

"Paddle—paddle for your lives, or we are lost!" cried Captain Helm, setting the example by placing himself astride of the mast, and endeavoring with his hands and feet to move it out of the course of the burning ship.

Tom and Phil did likewise, but they made very little progress.

An idea struck Tom, and he acted upon it at once; pulling off his jacket, he caught hold of the sleeves with his hands, and seized the tail with his mouth.

Then by elevating his arms above his head so as to form a triangle, he spread the garment to the breeze.

Phil took the hint and followed his example.

The advantage of this plan was at once apparent, for the mast commenced to glide along steadily.

The captain still further accelerated their progress by letting himself down into the water, placing his hands on the rear of the mast, and kicking vigorously with his feet.

The position of the captain also enabled him to steer the mast in the direction they wished to go.

In a short time they were more than a hundred and fifty yards from the burning ship.

Feeling now comparatively safe, Captain Helm and the two boys ceased their exertions for a few moments and looked back.

As they did so, the flaming ship swept over two of the sailors who were clinging to a spar, and they were seen no more.

By some strange fatality the Comet had drifted back to the very spot where she was abandoned.

The few surviving men strove frantically to escape from the danger that threatened them.

In vain were their efforts; the doomed ship, looking like some spirit of destruction, was in their very midst.

There was a moment or two of breathless suspense, during which time itself seemed standing still.

Suddenly a huge column of fire swept up to heaven, making the very sun look dim.

Then there was a report as if the firmament was shivered to pieces.

The Comet and those who were near her had disappeared forever.

A shower of burning fragments fell hissing into the sea, and a dense cloud of thick, murky smoke settled down over the fatal spot.

Of all those who were left on the ship by their black-hearted comrades, none were left to tell the tale but Captain Helm, Tom and Phil.

And they were alone on the wide, heaving sea, for the boat was fast disappearing in the dim distance.

Horried by the awful catastrophe which they had just witnessed, and startled by the narrowness of their own escape, they remained for some moments with blanched faces gazing at each other silently.

At length the captain spoke.

"Poor fellows," he said, "they are gone, let us be thankful that we are spared, be the time ever so short."

"It was a long time before the Comet blew up," said Tom.

"Yes; I dare say she strained so much during the storm, that some of her seams opened and let in enough water to dampen the cargo, or the powder would have caught fire sooner."

The sea was strewn with pieces of timber, and the captain and the two boys went to work to collect material for a raft.

By swimming first in one direction, and then another, they managed to secure a large spar and a considerable quantity of plank.

The spar was placed parallel to and about eight feet from the mast; pieces of plank reaching from one to the other were then laid at short intervals, and securely lashed with some of the rigging.

A kind of floor was then laid on the cross pieces of plank, and secured in the same way.

Finally the chest was placed in the center of the raft thus formed and fastened to the planks with ropes.

It was with extreme difficulty that this was accomplished, but they worked as only men can work when their lives are at stake.

It was late in the afternoon before their task was completed, and Captain Helm, as well as the boys, was completely tired out, and it was with feelings of deep thankfulness they crawled up on the frail structure to rest themselves.

The raft was not sufficiently buoyant to keep them entirely dry; water oozed up between the planks and occasionally a wave washed over it, but by sitting on the chest they were able to keep everything except their feet out of the water.

They had scarcely seated themselves, when Tom sprang to his feet, and cried out:

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" eagerly asked the captain.

"Look!" replied Tom, pointing to the southwest.

Every eye was turned to the quarter indicated, and the top-sails of a vessel were distinctly seen.

A few minutes' observation established the fact that she was coming towards them.

Sail after sail came in view, and finally the hull was visible.

It was a large clipper-ship with all sails set, and she was apparently bearing straight down on them.

Joy sprang in every heart.

"We must shout when she is near enough," said the captain, "or she may run us down."

On came the gallant ship, her copper

sheathing shining like burnished gold, as she arose and fell on the long swell of the ocean.

She was soon near enough for them to see the flag of their own country, the stars and stripes, was floating from the head of her mainmasts, and they felt certain of their being saved.

But alas! the ship's course was altered, and she passed more than a quarter of a mile to the windward of them.

In vain they shouted, screamed, and waved their coats in the air.

The wind wafted the sound of their voices in an opposite direction from the vessel, and the raft was so low in the water that they were not observed.

With every sail drawing, a perfect cataract of foam roaring under the fore-foot and breaking around her prow, the ship passed on her way and left them to their fate.

Their hearts sank like lead in their bosoms; their disappointment was too great for words, and with straining eyes they watched the vessel until she disappeared.

The next object that attracted their attention was not of a character to raise their spirits.

It was a dorsal fin of a huge shark which was seen cutting the water a short distance from them.

Phil pointed at it, and said:

"D'y'e mind that fellow, now? It's glad I am we are not in the water."

"Yes, we are lucky to have the raft," replied the captain; "and until it was finished I was in constant dread that the sharks would attack us, for I knew they were numerous in these waters."

By the time he ceased speaking five or six of the savage monsters were swimming around the raft, casting hungry glances at its occupants.

"Do you think we are safe from them now?" asked Tom.

"Certainly; they can't get at us on the raft."

The sharks, however, were disposed to try it; one of the largest dashed at the raft like lightning, but his head came in contact with the mast, and it drew off apparently somewhat injured.

The next moment another one made a rush just as a wave washed over the raft, and more than half of the body glided up on the raft.

Snapping his jaws viciously, it struggled so violently to get back into the water, that the raft swayed about and creaked as if it were about to go to pieces.

The voracious creature soon got off of the raft, but not before Tom had dealt it a severe blow on the head with a piece of plank, which cut a gash some six inches long, and caused the blood to flow freely.

No sooner was the wounded shark back into the sea, than the others assailed it with the greatest fury, and in spite of its desperate resistance, tore it to pieces and devoured it.

After this, no further attempt was made on the raft, but the sharks continued to swim about near to it.

Using two pieces of plank for oars, and another to steer with, the captain and the two boys rowed around where the ship blew up, in hopes of finding some provisions.

They found nothing in the way of food but a small quantity of biscuit in a box, but they were fortunate enough to pick up a boat's mast, with the sail and rigging attached to it.

They set up the mast on the raft, spread the sail, and just as the sun set, and darkness crept over the sea, directed their course by the stars, and steered for the coast of India, which the captain supposed to be some eighty miles distant.

CHAPTER V.

LAND AT LAST—DISAPPEARANCE OF CAPTAIN HELM.

THE captain, Tom and Phil steered the craft by turns, and while one was thus engaged, the other two, with ropes around their waists to keep them from slipping off, sat on the chest and slept a little.

At length the night passed, and morning came.

Eagerly they scanned the sea on every side, in hopes of seeing a vessel.

But there was nothing to be seen, except a wide waste of waters, the sky, a few sea-birds, and the sharks which continued to swim around the raft.

The captain proposed that they should eat something, and they took a few mouthfuls of

the biscuit, but they had been soaked in the salt water, and were bitter and unpalatable.

They soon began to suffer with thirst, and as the day advanced, it became almost unbearable.

The wind, however, continued fair, and their spirits were kept up by the hope of reaching land.

Night again came, and slowly the hours dragged by.

Towards morning it fell calm, and about sunrise a breeze sprang up which blew them back in the direction from whence they came.

This discouraged Tom and Phil very much, but the captain reassured them by saying it was a land breeze and would soon cease.

In order to avoid losing any of the distance they had made, they lowered the sail.

While waiting for the wind to change, Tom told Captain Helm about finding his father's watch and how Croley acted.

Tom had mentioned the matter before, but he gave a minute account of Croley's actions from the time they first met.

"His conduct has certainly been very strange," said the captain.

"What do you know about him?"

"Very little, but the way in which he deserted us proves him to be a villain."

"How long have you been acquainted with him?"

"I never saw him until the day before we sailed. He was employed by the owners of the Comet."

"I believe he had a hand in my father's murder."

"Very likely."

"If I ever meet him, he will have to give a very straight account of himself, or one of us will go up sure."

"I'm with you, my boy; I have an account to settle with him for the way he served us."

"Be Jabbers an so have I," put in Phil, "and so you can just count me in, ivry time."

"If Croley did help kill my father," said Tom, "or knows anything about it, I want to make him tell everything."

"I feel like shooting him down on sight," replied the captain grinding his teeth.

"If you do that, I may never find out who murdered my father; and I won't be satisfied until I know that every one who had a hand in it is wiped out."

"If I'm not much mistaken in the man, you will find it a hard job to make Croley tell anything."

"I'll wring the secret out of his heart, or perish in the attempt."

"Well, I like your spirit, and will stick to you. Let us pledge ourselves to hunt him down."

"Agreed," replied Tom and Phil, and they all shook hands on it.

The land breeze now ceased to blow, and a favorable wind sprang up.

The sail was hoisted, and the raft once more glided on its way.

About ten o'clock they saw a low, black streak in the distance.

"Hurrah!" cried the captain: "there's the land, and if the wind does not shift, we'll soon be ashore."

The wind did not shift, but it freshened to a gale, and the sea every moment got higher and higher.

The air was filled with spray, and wave after wave dashed over the raft, which labored as if it was about to go to pieces, and whose motion was that of a continual plunge, as though going deeper and deeper all the time.

Notwithstanding the roughness of the sea, the sharks continued to hover around the raft, and appeared to come closer to it, as if they thought their prey was almost within their reach.

The pertinacity with which the blood-thirsty creatures stuck to them made the cold chills creep over every one.

The raft, however, owing to its being fastened together with ropes, yielded to the waves but stuck together; had the cross-pieces been nailed, so as to make it tight, it would have soon gone to pieces.

The land where the raft approached it was covered as far as eye could reach with a dense, unbroken forest, between which and the sea was a narrow strip of surf-bound beach, upon which the huge waves were breaking with a noise like thunder.

"An'd'y'e think we can land?" asked Phil.

"We can't help it," replied Captain Helm.

"The wind and tide are carrying us towards the shore, and the best ship that was ever

built could not claw off if she were where we are."

The fastenings of the raft had been strained and stretched, so that the planks now worked about like sticks in a loosely tied bundle, and it was a miracle that the whole thing did not tumble into pieces.

For the next few minutes it was hurried along at a terrific rate of speed, alternately rising on top of the vast billows and sliding down into the trough of the sea, as though it would never stop.

"As soon as the raft strikes," said the captain, "jump off, and try to get beyond the reach of the next wave, or you will be swept back and drowned."

"An' thin the bloody sharks would ate us afther all," remarked Phil.

"Of course. Hold on now like grim death. We are getting among the breakers."

The next moment the waves were flashing all around them and the raft was tossed about like a feather till, borne on the crest of a huge billow, it was shot far up on the beach.

The shock was so severe that the raft went to pieces, and all hands were thrown prostrate on the sand with such violence that the breath was almost completely knocked out of them.

But there was no time to be lost, and they scrambled ahead as fast as possible.

The next wave, roaring like a monster enraged at being cheated of its prey, dashed over them, but they dug their toes in the sand, and avoided being swept back by it.

A few steps more carried them beyond the reach of the waves, and they were safe from the perils of the sea.

But they did not pause until they had crossed the beach and reached the welcome shade of an immense tree which stood in the edge of the forest.

Then with cramped and stiffened limbs, but gratefulness, they stretched themselves on the grass.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Tom, "we are safe at last!"

"I am afraid not," replied the captain.

"Why?"

"There is great danger that we will be killed by the first natives we meet."

"Surely they will not harm ship-wrecked men?"

"Don't you believe it; they will jump at the chance."

"But we are Americans!"

"That's barrin' me," ejaculated Phil, "an' I'm an Irish-American."

"Our nationality will not save us," replied the captain. "Ever since the Sepoys mutinied, they murder all the white people they can, regardless of age, sex or condition."

"Then we are in a bad box," said Tom; "what can we do?"

"Try to make our way to some port where there are British troops."

"Do you know which way to go?"

"Not exactly; we had better keep along the sea shore, travel at night, and hide in the jungle during the day; if we escape the natives and tigers, and do not starve to death, we may reach a place of safety."

"Have you any idea where we are now?"

"I think we are somewhere north of the Mupurra river."

"An' it's at the river I wish we were now," said Phil, "for I'm kilt entirely by the thirst."

"We all need water," said Captain Helm, "let us look for some," but when he attempted to rise, his left leg, which was sprained when the raft struck, pained him so severely that he sank back on the ground.

"Stay where you are, captain," said Tom, "we will bring you some water, if we can find any."

"All right; be careful, and don't lose yourselves."

The beach was strewn with shells, and Tom and Phil picked up two large ones, and started on their search.

After forcing their way through the dense thickets for about an hour, they found a small pond, the surface of which was covered with green slime and fallen leaves.

On brushing the scum aside, however, they found the water underneath to be clean, though colored by decayed vegetation.

After satisfying their thirst, they filled their shells, and started back to the beach, which they reached without difficulty, at a point not far from where they had entered the forest.

On arriving at the tree where Captain Helm was left, they were surprised to find that he was gone.

The grass was trampled down, as if there had been some kind of a struggle.

On examining the spot closely, they were horrified to find that the grass was spattered with blood.

"Great God!" exclaimed Tom, "what has become of the captain?"

Before Phil could make a reply, the sharp reports of two guns rang out on the air in quick succession.

The shell in which Phil was carrying water flew into pieces and a bullet cut its way through Tom's clothing just over his heart.

Panic-stricken, the boys, as if actuated by one impulse, plunged into the jungle, and fled for their lives.

CHAPTER VI.

UP A TREE—THE CORAL SNAKE—FIRST BLOOD FOR TOM—A BRAVE GIRL.

BRAVER boys than Tom and Phil never lived, but for the time being they yielded blindly to the instinct of self-preservation.

Nor is it in any wise to their discredit that they did so.

Their nerves were unstrung by exposure, fasting and constant danger on the raft; their imagination was excited by what the captain said about the natives and they were horrified by his mysterious disappearance, and the indications that he had been killed.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that when they heard the reports of the guns, and the whistling of bullets aimed at them, that they fled without a moment's hesitation.

On they sped in their wild flight, tearing through thorny thickets, and occasionally tripped up by vines, or falling into gullies, which were concealed by the dense grass, while behind them they constantly heard the sound of pursuit.

As yet Tom and Phil had not seen their foes, but that in nowise decreased their terror, for an unknown enemy is always terrible.

The two boys strained every nerve, but could not gain on their pursuers, whom they could distinctly hear crashing through the bushes in their rear.

At length Phil struck one of his knees against a fallen tree and bruised it severely.

"It's done for I am," he said. "Save yourself, Tom, an' don't be afther mindin' me."

"I'll never leave you," replied Tom; "take hold of my arm and keep up a little longer, we may dodge them."

"There's no use to thry, I'm used up completely."

The patter of their pursuers' footsteps sounded plainer and plainer.

Tom glanced around eagerly and said:

"Here, let us get up into this thick tree, and they may miss us."

This suggestion was acted upon at once.

Catching hold of the limbs of a low, wide-spreading tree, which was covered with vines bearing large, trumpet-shaped flowers, the two boys climbed up into the branches and hid themselves in the luxuriant foliage.

They had scarcely concealed themselves when two Sepoys, carrying muskets in their hands, and having long knives in their belts, came in sight, passed directly under the tree, and kept on their way at a long, swinging trot.

"Be jabbers," said Phil in a whisper, "the've passed us."

"Hist!" replied Tom in the same tone, "keep still, they may return."

His fears were speedily realized, for the Sepoys, missing the trail they had been following, stopped and held a consultation.

Then one of them started off to make a circuit, while the other retraced his steps.

The latter Tom and Phil soon saw gliding towards them with the stealthy and noiseless tread of a fox, his keen eyes rolling from side to side, now glancing into the tangled thickets, and now roving over the ground, or scanning the trees.

When he arrived at the tree in which the boys were, he stopped short, knelt down, and carefully examined some marks which his eye had detected amongst the dry leaves and grass.

After carefully scrutinizing the signs he had observed for a few minutes, he arose with a grin of satisfaction on his villainous countenance, and began to peer up amongst the branches of the tree.

The foliage was so dense, that at first Tom and Phil were not discovered.

But in a short time the Sepoy fixed his eyes upon them, cocked his gun, and aiming at Tom, said, in pretty fair English:

"Come down, or I'll fire."

"Shoot and be hanged," replied Tom, who preferred to be shot rather than butchered in cold blood.

The Sepoy kept his musket pointed at Tom a short time longer, but did not fire.

He probably reflected that the report of his gun would summon his companion, whom he did not wish to come until he had killed the boys, stripped them of their clothes and cut off their heads, for which he would receive a reward.

So laying his gun on the ground, and throwing off his coat, he commenced to climb the tree.

Tom and Phil retreated to the topmost limbs, broke off some branches, denuded them of leaves, so they could use them as clubs, and determined to defend themselves to the last gasp.

The Sepoy, regardless of the preparations made to receive him, continued to ascend, and was soon within eight feet of Tom.

After pausing a minute or two to get breath, he took his knife—not a bright blade, but a dull, bluish-colored weapon—from his belt, placed it between his teeth, and crept along the limbs towards his intended victims.

Some vines impeded his progress, and he impatiently jerked them aside. The movement inverted one of the trumpet-shaped flowers, and a slender, bright red object slipped out of it into the breast of the Sepoy.

The next instant he uttered an exclamation of terror, and frantically clutched at his bosom.

The knife dropped from his mouth, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, he clenched his teeth, and his body worked as with a spasm of agony.

After writhing about for a short time as if suffering intensely, the Sepoy apparently grew weak, and his legs slipped off of the limb, but clasping his hands around the branch, he held on with convulsive energy.

For a few minutes he hung thus suspended, then uttering a deep groan, slowly and reluctantly relaxed his hold, fell crashing through the boughs and struck the earth with a sickening thud.

"By ther powers!" exclaimed Phil. "that bates me. What's the manin' av it?"

"He must have had a fit," replied Tom, who, notwithstanding the fact that a few minutes before he was about to engage in a death struggle, had not lost his presence of mind, and was already sliding down the tree to secure the Sepoy's arms.

In two minutes more he had the musket in his hands, and was joined by Phil, who picked up the knife.

"Now let that other rascal come," said Tom, whose spirits had risen a hundred per cent.; "we are ready for him."

"Sure, we'd better be goin'," replied Phil, "there may be more than one av them."

"No, I'll get this fellow's cartridge box, and then we will hide in the thicket until dark; if we start off now that other chap may shoot us down before we see him."

"D'ye think this one is dead?"

"He must be; the fall was enough to kill him."

The Sepoy was, as Tom supposed, dead as a herring.

As Tom bent over him to unbuckle the belt to his cartridge box, a tiny snake of a bright crimson color about eight inches long, and not thicker than a goose-quill, glided out of the bosom of the man's loose shirt and coiled itself ready to strike.

"Look out!" shouted Phil. "Git out av ther way!"

Influenced more by Phil's earnestness than by any personal apprehension of danger, Tom drew back and said:

"Why, you are not afraid of that little thing, are you?"

"Sure an' I am though; it's a coral schnake. Miny's ther time I've heard ther ould sailors tell of the same, an' you'd better be sthruck wid lightnin' than bit by it."

And Phil was right, for persons struck by lightning sometimes recover—those bitten by the coral snake never.

The diminutive little creature, which, from its size, elegant shape, and vivid color, might well have served as a model for a dainty lady's

bracelet, was one of the most deadly reptiles known to man.

As if conscious of the fatal character of its bite, the snake made no effort to escape, but remained coiled ready to strike, with its head erect and its fiery little eyes fixed on Tom.

While Tom kept still the reptile remained quiet; soon as he stirred, however, it sprang at him, but fell short, and before it could recoil itself, Tom crushed the life out of it with the stock of the musket.

"It was ther schnake that killed ther Say-poy," said Phil. "The craytures sthay in ther vines an' flowers, an' it must 'ave crawled inter his clothes."

"It was a lucky thing for us," replied Tom, "or before now we would have had a taste of cold steel."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the sharp snap of a percussion cap was heard.

The boys wheeled around, and saw the companion of the dead Sepoy. He had crawled up to within fifteen paces of them, and attempted to shoot Tom, but was foiled by his gun missing fire.

Uttering an exclamation of rage, the man clubbed his musket and rushed at Tom to dash out his brains.

The movement was so rapid that Tom scarcely had time to throw his gun to his shoulder and fire.

But the bullet sped true to its mark, and the Sepoy, pierced through the heart, fell headlong to the ground dead.

Though Tom knew that he had fired the shot in self-defense, that if he had hesitated an instant the lives of himself and Phil would have been forfeited, he could not repress a shudder when he looked on the distorted features of the man he had slain.

But it was no time for idle regrets.

Stripping the uniforms off of the dead Sepoys, the two boys slipped them on over the clothes they had on, and then buckled the belts of the accoutrements around their waists.

Tom and Phil were now well-armed and equipped, each of them having a musket, forty rounds of ammunition, a long knife, canteen and a haversack well-filled with cooked food.

The body of the Sepoy who fell out of the tree was found to be much swollen, and his tawny skin had turned black. On his breast and side, in the region of the heart, were a number of punctures, not larger than might be made by a cambric needle, indicating where the coral snake had buried its fangs.

Leaving the corpses where they were, Tom and Phil went to a thicket near at hand, and ate some of the food found in the haversacks.

Then shouldering their guns, they started off to search for Captain Helm, determining that if he was alive they would save him or perish in the attempt.

But while flying from the Sepoys they had turned and twisted about so much that they were uncertain whether they were going the right way or not.

Phil's bruised knee was quite painful, but the generous-hearted boy vowed he would go to the captain's assistance, if he had to crawl on his hands and knees.

After walking about an hour, they saw a building of very considerable size, with a number of outhouses grouped around it.

Being uncertain whether the place was occupied by white people or natives, Tom and Phil approached it very cautiously.

They soon arrived at a low wall which inclosed a garden that lay back of the main building.

Crouching down in some bushes, the boys kept their eyes fixed on the house, in hopes of seeing some of the occupants.

But apparently no one was stirring about the premises, and the silence was profound.

A few minutes passed, and suddenly the whole place started into internal life.

A yell arose from the front of the house, long, wild and piercing—a yell that had murder and exultation in it.

Then there was a rattling discharge of fire-arms, shrieks, groans, and the clashing of weapons.

Satisfied that the fight going on was between whites and natives, Tom and Phil without a moment's hesitation leaped over the low wall, and dashed up to the house.

The uproar was appalling; it seemed as if a legion of devils had broken loose, and the

air was filled with the sound of blows, shouts, cries, oaths and pistol shots.

In one of the rooms, through an open window, the boys saw a beautiful girl, with bare arms, and disheveled hair, who, revolver in hand, was defending herself against some Sepoys.

The heroic girl had shot down two of her assailants, and was in the act of sending a bullet through the heart of a third, while a villain behind her had his sword raised to cut her down.

CHAPTER VII.

ON HAND IN TIME—IN THE THICK OF IT—PHIL BAGS A SEPOY—A BLOODY REPULSE.

THE keen sword was hissing through the air to descend on the brave girl's head.

In another minute her skull would have been cloven, when, quick as lightning, Tom and Phil raised their muskets, and fired together.

The Sepoy officer clapped his left hand to his breast, staggered back and fell.

The next minute Tom and Phil leaped into the room through the low window.

As they did so, the girl covered Tom with her revolver, and cried out:

"Stand back, or I'll fire!"

"Don't shoot," replied Tom; "we are friends."

"None are friends who wear that uniform."

"We assumed it for disguise—we are shipwrecked sailors—Americans."

The girl now recognized the fact that they were white, and said:

"Then, for Heaven's sake, come with me to the assistance of my father."

"Lead on," replied the boys, who had hastily reloaded their muskets.

"This way," replied the girl, turning and darting through an open door into a corridor, closely followed by Tom and Phil.

With the sound of clashing arms, shouts, groans and shrieks ringing in their ears, the two boys and their conductress quickly passed through the corridors and emerged into a large room.

At the further end of the apartment a tall, gray-bearded man, with his back against the wall, was defending himself against six Sepoys.

The heavy dragoon's saber with which the old man was armed had drawn blood more than once, and two Sepoys lay dead at his feet.

But he had not escaped scatheless. His left arm hung powerless by his side, and it was evident that the unequal contest could not be prolonged many minutes.

All this Tom, Phil and the girl took in at a glance, and acted instantly.

Bang! bang! bang! went the girl's pistol and the guns of the boys.

Two of the Sepoys dropped to the floor dead and another was desperately wounded.

Before the other three could recover from their surprise at the sudden attack, Tom and Phil dashed upon them with the bayonet and pinned two of them to the floor.

The sixth Sepoy, terrified at the fate of his comrades, leaped through a window and fled.

"Thank God, you are alive!" exclaimed the girl, throwing her arms around the gray-headed man; "but you are bleeding—you are wounded!"

"It is nothing but a scratch, my child," he replied; "but how did you escape? I heard shots in your room, but the rascals pressed me so hard I could not go to your assistance."

"I owe my safety to these brave young men and the pistol you taught me to use."

"Then we are both indebted to them for our lives. I could not have held out much longer."

Turning to the boys, the gray-headed man continued: "I am Colonel Kelly, and this is my daughter Flora. By what name shall I thank our preserver?"

Tom told who Phil and himself were.

The colonel grasped their hands alternately, squeezed them hard and said:

"God bless you, my boys. I do not know how to thank you as I wish, but you have my heartfelt gratitude. And my dear, motherless child will bless and pray for you for having saved us from a cruel death."

Tom and Phil blushed like girls, and protested that they had done nothing more than any one else would have done under the circumstances.

The colonel shook his head, and said:

"We will speak of this hereafter, we have no time to spare now. Come into the next room; we must barricade the doors, and be ready for another attack."

As the party stepped into the adjoining room a native, whose mustache curled up nearly to his eyes, and who carried a bloody sword in his hand, came through a doorway on the opposite side of the apartment.

Tom and Phil were about to bayonet him, when the colonel cried out:

"Hold! he is my peon, and as true as steel," then addressing the native, continued:

"Hamet, fasten the doors, and be quick about it."

Assisted by the boys, Hamet soon locked the doors and further secured them with heavy bars, which had been provided for the purpose.

While Hamet was binding up the colonel's wounded arm, Tom and Phil had leisure to look about them. They found that they were in a room without windows, but lighted by a skylight, which was protected by a heavy grating.

As soon as the colonel's wound was bandaged, he said:

"Hamet, get out the arms, we must be ready, for the rascals may attack us at any moment."

Hamet threw open a closet door, and revealed quite a collection of guns of various kinds, a dozen heavy revolvers, and an abundance of ammunition.

"Some of the guns I had for sporting purposes," explained the colonel, "the others and the pistols I intended to place in the hands of my attendants, if I thought it necessary; but we were attacked so suddenly and unexpectedly, that there was no time to do so."

All hands at once went to work and loaded the guns and pistols.

The task was scarcely finished when something obscured a part of the skylight.

"Sure, there's some wan on ther skylight," said Phil.

Every eye was at once turned upwards, and the figure of a man was dimly seen through the thick glass.

"Shoot him," said the colonel.

Phil snatched up a sporting rifle, took aim and fired.

There was a loud report, resounding with stunning effect in that confined space of the room, and a crash of shattered glass. A dark form writhed about on the skylight for a few moments, and then lay still, while large drops of blood pattered down, forming a crimson pool on the floor.

"It's like a murtherer I fale," said Phil, ruefully.

"Pooh!" replied the colonel. "If you had not fired promptly, the rascal would probably have shot one of us by this time."

The sounds of conflict, shrieks of despair, and cries for mercy that were heard throughout the house had now ceased, and no sound was audible save an occasional crash, as if doors or drawers were being forced open by the plunderers.

Finally even this noise ceased, and everything was still.

"Perhaps they have gone," said Flora.

"Not a bit of it," replied the colonel. "They will make a desperate attempt to get us out of here."

"Can they succeed?"

"I think not."

"It seems to me," said Tom, "that we can hold this room against a large number."

"The house is wood," quietly observed Hamet.

"Confound it!" exclaimed the colonel. "I did not think of that—the villains may burn us out!"

The sound of footsteps were now heard in the corridor.

In an instant thereafter there were tremendous and resounding blows upon one of the doors.

The Sepoys were battering it with a heavy beam.

"Fire the shot-guns first, and then use your revolvers," said the colonel, in a low voice; "if they get into the room, we will be overpowered by the mere weight of numbers."

It was evident that the door must soon yield, and every one, including Flora Kelly, stood ready with gun in hand and revolvers in their belts, awaiting the coming struggle.

There was a few moments of breathless suspense.

Before the furious blows the fastenings of the door gave way.

The bar was broken, the lock was crushed in, the hinges burst off, and the door fell.

With a fierce yell a crowd of Sepoys swarmed to the attack.

The corridor was literally packed with the villainous crew, who had tasted blood and were eager for more.

But ere the foremost of the thronging throng could pass through the open doorway, five double-barreled shot-guns, heavily charged with buck-shot, were fired among them, and immediately afterwards a perfect storm of revolver bullets, before which nothing living could stand, swept the passage.

The tumult and uproar were appalling.

Under the withering fire men fell like grass before the scythe of a reaper.

In less time than it takes to write it, the floor of the narrow passage was strewn with the dead and dying, who were crushed and trampled on by the unhurt and slightly wounded, in their eagerness to flee.

Nor did that frantic flight cease until the corridor was cleared of all save the dead and disabled.

A more bloody and disheartening repulse could scarcely be imagined, and the Sepoys seemed to be in no hurry to renew the attack.

But Tom and his companions did not relax their vigilance, for they did not know at what moment the assault would be repeated.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RETREAT—FIGHT IN THE STABLE—THUNDERBOLT AND BANSHEE—HISTORICAL—A NEW DANGER.

AFTER reloading their guns and pistols, Colonel Kelly and his party held a council of war.

Colonel Kelly and Hamet were both confident that the Sepoys would burn the residence, so it was determined to make an attempt to reach the stable, which being built of stone, and covered with tiles, was supposed to be safe from fire.

The door on the opposite side of the room from the one that was battered down, was cautiously opened, and the apartment in which Colonel Kelly was first attacked found to be unoccupied.

Holding their arms ready for instant use, the party passed through that chamber, threaded a corridor, reached the room where Tom and Phil first saw Flora, and from it emerged into the yard at the back of the house.

Not a Sepoy was in sight, and a rush was made for the stable, which was about fifty yards distant.

Before half of the distance was passed they were discovered, and a fire opened on them from the upper windows of the house.

Without stopping to return the poorly directed shots, the fugitives continued their flight.

The stable was nearly reached when a party of Sepoys turned the corner of it and made a dash at them.

A well-directed volley made the villains recoil, and the next moment Tom and his companions entered the stable and closed and fastened the door behind them.

A twilight gloom prevailed the interior of the stable, so that it was difficult for persons coming from the open air to distinguish objects plainly at first, but the semi-obscurity was far from unpleasant, for the glare of the sun in India is oppressive to both man and brute.

"Well," said Colonel Kelly, as soon as he had recovered his breath, "we are safe for a time at least."

He had scarcely ceased speaking, when four Sepoys, who had gone into the stable to steal the horses, rushed from the stalls where they had at first been concealed, and threw themselves on the new-comers.

A terrible hand-to-hand struggle now ensued in the dim light of the stable.

Parrying the first blows of their assailants, Colonel Kelly, Tom, Phil, and Hamet each grappled with one of their enemies.

So closely were they locked together after the first onset that the combatants could not use their weapons, and Flora Kelly was afraid to fire, lest she should kill one of her friends.

The fight—or rather the fights, for there were four single combats in progress at the same time—though waged with great fury, did not last long.

Though Colonel Kelly could only use his right arm, he fastened on the throat of his

opponent, and with ferocious energy, beat his head against the stone wall of the stable with a power beyond the strength of human skill to withstand.

Phil, after wrestling with his man for some time, tripped and threw him, and before he could rise, drew a pistol and shot him dead.

Hamet managed to draw his knife and dispatch his antagonist.

But, in the meantime, Tom was not so fortunate; for the Sepoy who attacked him was powerful fellow, and sprang upon him so suddenly, that he was borne to the floor between the two horses' stalls.

Kneeling upon Tom's breast, and compressing his throat with a grasp of iron, the Sepoy drew his dagger to dispatch him.

Tom's life now hung on a slender thread indeed.

The murderous weapon was just about to be plunged into his unprotected breast, when a horse that he and the Sepoy were just behind, excited by the struggle, lashed out furiously with his heels.

One of the iron-shod hoofs caught the Sepoy under the chin, and broke his neck, and knocked him off of Tom.

Though thus providentially relieved of his antagonist, Tom was by no means out of danger, for the horse continued to kick viciously.

By dragging himself along with his hands, Tom, however, reached a place of safety, and arose to his feet just about the time his companions disposed of their opponents.

Releasing his hold on the Sepoy whose brains he had pounded out, and letting the limp and lifeless body fall to the ground, Colonel Kelly said:

"Hamet, get the lantern; we must search the stable. There may be more of the rascals hid in it."

Hamet went into a small room where saddles and other horse trappings were kept, got a light, and the stable was carefully examined.

No Sepoys were found, but two of the colonel's grooms were discovered concealed among the forage in the loft.

Finding that they were among friends, the grooms recovered from their panic and expressed a determination to fight for their lives.

Nor was it an idle promise, for their behavior afterward afforded another evidence of the fact, that under the leadership of white men the natives of India readily perform brave, nay, even desperate deeds.

The Sepoys apparently had no intention of attacking the stable, but occasionally fired a shot at it and reviled the occupants, telling them that in a short time they should be massacred.

After Hamet and the grooms had dragged the Sepoys to the back part of the stable and covered them up with straw, Tom and his companions, who had now a breathing spell, very naturally talked about the incidents of the late conflict.

When Tom related the particulars of his encounter, and pointed out the horse that saved him, Colonel Kelly exclaimed:

"By Jove, it was a narrow escape, and I'll make you a present of the horse that saved your life. I call him Thunderbolt. He is a thorough Arabian, swifter than an antelope, and more tireless than a wolf for on him I have ridden down and speared both of those animals."

Tom had all of a boy's fondness for horses, and was a splendid rider.

He could scarcely find words to thank the colonel, or to express his admiration of Thunderbolt, who was, indeed, a perfect equine beauty, black as midnight, with long, flowing mane and tail, and a skin that shone like satin.

Tom was much pleased with Thunderbolt that for the time being he forgot all about the dangers which surrounded him, and the only regret he had, was that he did not know how he could divide his present with Phil.

But no such thought found a place in Phil's head; there was never a trace of envy in his generous heart, and he was as sincerely glad of Tom's good fortune as if it had fallen to his own lot.

The joy of the two boys, therefore, can readily be imagined when Colonel Kelly pointed to a clean-limbed iron-gray horse, and said:

"Master Phil, that is your steed, accept him with my best wishes; his name is Banshee, and I give you my word, he is a worthy mate

of Thunderbolt, in blood, speed and endurance."

The colonel then took Tom and Phil into the small room at the end of the stable, and presented each of them with a splendid saddle, bridle, and pair of spurs.

The two boys were profuse in their acknowledgments, but the colonel stopped them, saying:

"You owe me no thanks; I am getting too old to ride such spirited horses, and but for your timely arrival and brave behavior, neither Flora nor myself would now be alive."

This matter being disposed of, and Hamet, who with the grooms was watching the Sepoys, reporting that there was no indication of an attack on the stable, Tom and Phil, at the request of Colonel Kelly, gave a short account of how they came to India, and of what had happened to them.

After the boys were through, Colonel Kelly related the circumstances that led to the attack on his house, and gave a brief account of the Sepoy mutiny, about the nature and magnitude of which Tom and Phil had a very vague idea.

The story of the Sepoy mutiny fills some of the most blood-stained pages of history, and many of the incidents were as full of horror as though devils had acted them, while angels looked on and wept. Yet the details of the gigantic struggle which was waged with incredible ferocity, were never generally known in America, and are now, in a great measure, forgotten.

Many things which occurred during the progress of the mutiny will be found in the succeeding pages of this narrative, and the story of its commencement cannot better be told than by giving the substance of Colonel Kelly's account which I have divested of verbiage, and added thereto certain facts about the colonel which the modesty of that gallant officer made him merely allude to or pass over entirely.

Colonel Arthur Kelly, after serving with distinction for many years in the army, had a disagreement with a superior officer which caused him to retire from the military service on half pay.

Though past the prime of life Colonel Kelly was still active and vigorous, and did not wish to remain idle.

His high character and extensive knowledge of Indian affairs enabled him to secure the lucrative and responsible position of a collector in the civil service of the East India Company.

Colonel Kelly at once entered upon the discharge of his duties, and for several years won golden opinions alike from the officers of the East India Company and the natives.

Then a mutiny which had no parallel in the history of India broke out, threatening the expulsion of the British from the country.

It seemed as if the prediction long since made was about to be realized, and that some fine morning all the Europeans in India would get up with their throats cut.

The flash of lightning which Sir Charles Napier feared had come blasting and destroying.

Mohammedans and Hindoos had combined against the enemies of their faith determining to destroy or expel them.

A prediction had been generally circulated, and extensively believed, that the British power would be overthrown in the year 1837.

But the ostensible and immediate cause of the outbreak was the introduction into the army of a cartridge which was greased, and the native troops believed that it was a deliberate attempt to make them come in contact with animal substance, which they abhorred, and which their religion forbade them to touch.

The disaffection spread like wild fire, and the Sepoys, of whom the bulk of the British army in India was composed, mutinied, murdered their white officers, and made war on the Europeans and all natives who remained in their service.

The panic at Calcutta was so great, that Colonel Kelly, and various other collectors, were directed to use their discretion about abandoning the treasure at their stations, or attempting to save it.

Like most of Indian officers, Colonel Kelly doubted the spread of the mutiny, until it assumed so threatening an appearance that he was forced to believe that an attempt to move the large amount of money in his possession without a strong guard would provoke an attack. So he determined to remain

with it, until troops could be sent to escort it to a place of safety.

The white troops in India, however, were so few in number that weeks passed before any could be spared for that purpose.

At length Colonel Kelly was notified that a company of infantry had started to his relief.

The day before the troops were expected to arrive a band of mutineers made an attack on the station, plundered the treasure, and but for the opportune arrival of Tom and Phil, would, as the reader has already been informed, have murdered Colonel Kelly and his daughter.

A few minutes after Colonel Kelly concluded his narration, the Sepoys, who had not completely gutted his residence, set it on fire.

The house was dry as tinder, and it was soon reduced to a heap of smoldering ruins.

But the Sepoys evinced no disposition to leave, as it was hoped they would do after the house was destroyed.

On the contrary, they seemed to be expecting reinforcements, for they were constantly looking down the road, and several mounted men went off at intervals in the same direction.

A short time before sundown one of the mounted messengers came spurring back and imparted some information to the Sepoys, who at once began to yell loudly.

A few minutes afterwards a dull, rumbling noise was heard, and then a party of Sepoys appeared with some bullocks dragging a six-pound cannon.

This sight almost froze the blood in the hearts of those in the stable.

"I am afraid it is all up with us," said Colonel Kelly, grinding his teeth together. "They will batter the stable down, and kill us like rats in their holes."

CHAPTER XV.

DESPERATE DEEDS—IN THE TOILS OF DEVILS.

"CAN'T we hold out until the troops arrive?" asked Tom.

"I think not," replied Colonel Kelly. "If the gun is properly served the stable will be knocked to pieces long before they get here."

"How far off are they now?"

"They ought not to be more than fifteen miles away."

"If a message were sent to them, could they not make a forced march and get here before the stable can be battered down?"

"Perhaps so, but I don't think a messenger could reach them."

"Tell me what direction to take, and I'll try it."

"An' so will I," put in Phil.

There was a gleam of genuine admiration in Colonel Kelly's eyes when he heard these offers, but he shook his head and replied:

"It would just be throwing your lives away; no white person would stand the ghost of a chance to get through; a native might succeed, if he could run the gauntlet of the Sepoys that surrounded us."

"Then, why not send one of your men?"

"I don't like to order a man to go to what I have no doubt will be certain destruction."

"But if something is not done we will all be killed."

"That is so, therefore the attempt may as well be made, but the man who goes must do so willingly."

Hamet immediately offered to undertake the desperate enterprise.

But Colonel Kelly said that Buram, one of the grooms, who was a small, wiry fellow, and a magnificent horseman, would stand the best chance to succeed.

Turning to Buram, and addressing him in Hindostanee, the colonel offered him a thousand rupees if he would carry a message to the commander of the British troops that were on the march to the place.

Money will do anything with a native, and the groom at once signified his willingness to make the perilous attempt.

While he was saddling and bridling a horse, Colonel Kelly wrote a short note with a pencil on the blank leaf of a letter which he happened to have in his pocket.

When everything was ready, and Buram had received the note and his instructions, Colonel Kelly, Tom, Phil and Hamet placed themselves at the windows of the stable with their guns, ready to fire on any one who should attempt to intercept the messenger.

The other groom then threw open the door,

and Buram, who was already mounted, dashed out into the road, and urged his horse towards the low wall which inclosed it.

A fierce yell went up from the Sepoys, and bullets whistled around Buram as thick as hail.

He was apparently untouched until his horse rose to leap the wall, when a party of Sepoys, who were concealed behind it, sprang up and discharged their muskets in his very face.

Horse and rider went down together, and in another instant a dozen Sepoys were bayoneting the unfortunate Buram, or cutting him with their swords.

But the villains were not allowed to indulge in their bloody work with impunity; a volley fired from the stable laid three of them dead by the body of their victim and the rest sought shelter.

The fate of Buram made Tom and his companions shudder, but they did not waver in their determination to sell their lives dearly, and never surrender as long as they had strength to pull a trigger.

The Sepoys having charge of the cannon now brought it up, and while they were getting it into position, a galling fire was opened on them from the stable.

But the Sepoys stood their ground bravely, until they had loaded and fired the gun twice.

The first shot passed over the stable but the next tore off part of the roof.

The fire of Tom and his companions, however, proved so distressing that the Sepoys shifted the piece to a position at one end of the stable where they were secure from annoyance, for there was no window in the building.

In a few minutes the cannon was fired again, and the shell with which it was loaded burst in the loft of the stable.

"Saddle the horses," ordered Colonel Kelly "we will have to make a dash for it."

Fortunately there were six horses in the stable, just enough to mount the party, and they were all fine animals.

The horses were quickly caparisoned, but not before a strong scent of something burning filled the stable.

The shell had set the hay in the loft on fire, and in a few moments the roaring of the flamse could be distinctly heard.

"Mount," said the colonel, "and when you reach the road turn to the right."

The next moment every one was on horseback, and Hamet was about to throw open the doors when the six-pounder was discharged again, the ball crashing through the side of the stable and carrying off the head of Flora Kelly's horse.

As the animal was falling, Tom, who happened to be close to Flora's side, caught her in his arms and lifted her in front of him on his horse.

"Flora," cried Colonel Kelly, "are you hurt?"

"No, sir," replied the heroic girl, who during all this time had not uttered a word of fear.

"Then you had better ride behind me."

"I think not, Colonel Kelly," interposed Tom. "I am lighter than you are, and am unhurt."

"You are right, save her if you can. And if the worst comes to the worst, let every one keep a pistol-ball for themselves. Better suicide than the fate which awaits all who are captured alive."

The forage in the loft was now one mass of fire, and the flames were bursting out of the roof, and from under the eaves.

The Sepoys, feeling sure of their prey, were closing around the stable, and yelling like demons.

The horses were becoming very restive, and some one suggested that they be blindfolded, lest they should be disposed to run back into the burning building, but Colonel Kelly scouted the idea, saying:

"They are all true sons of the desert, who fear neither fire, water, beast nor devil. Let us be off, there is not a moment to be lost."

The door was thrown open and out of the flaming stable the little party charged like a thunderbolt into the midst of the host of human tigers, shooting, cutting down, and riding over everything in their way.

Phil and Hamet dashed out first, closely followed by Tom and Flora, while Colonel Kelly and the groom brought up the rear.

The Sepoys were taken completely by sur-

prise, and many of them were killed before they were aware of their peril.

Tom and his companions kept right onward, silent in all save the roar of their revolvers.

There was a confused mass of men who fired wildly and without aim, and were then rent asunder or destroyed.

When the smoke cleared away the yard was strewn with dead and wounded Sepoys.

In the meantime the fiery steeds had cleared the low wall at a bound, and were tearing along the broad road like a whirlwind.

Though hundreds of bullets were fired at the party after they emerged from the stable, strange to say, none of them were hit except the groom. He was riddled with balls, and fell near Buram, but his horse leaped the wall and kept on with the others.

Some of the Sepoys mounted and started in pursuit, but they soon saw that it was impossible for them to overtake the fugitives, and returned to their comrades.

Hamet secured the groom's horse, and Flora Kelly insisted upon riding it, though it had a man's saddle on it, but she was such a good horsewoman that she retained her seat with ease, notwithstanding their speed.

The headlong flight had continued for about two miles, when, at a sudden turn in the road, Tom and his friends encountered about twenty cavalymen, who heard them coming and drew up across the highway to bar their passage.

As well might a handful of saplings try to stop an avalanche, when it is plunging down the mountain side.

Without drawing rein, or stopping to count noses, Tom and his comrades hurled themselves upon the enemy's line, thundered through it, firing right and left and continued their flight.

It was over in the twinkling of an eye, but when it was done some half dozen saddles were empty, and the remaining Sepoys were so much demoralized that it was several seconds before they regained presence of mind sufficient to fire a scattering volley and give chase.

When the Sepoys fired, Colonel Kelly's horse turned off from the road almost at right angle, and darted off into the woods.

"What is the matter, colonel?" shouted Tom, checking his horse.

"Go ahead," cried Colonel Kelly, "I'm going to take a short cut."

There was no time for explanation; the pursuing Sepoys were close at hand, so Tom and the rest of his companions kept on their way, and Colonel Kelly disappeared in the forest.

Brave old man. His left arm was disabled before, and the Sepoy's volley shattered his right, and wounded his horse, so that it became frantic with pain and ran away with him, while he was entirely powerless to guide, much less check, its mad career.

Yet, though well aware that there was every prospect of his perishing miserably in the jungle, Colonel Kelly thought only of the safety of his daughter and friends, and deceived Tom, because he knew that otherwise the whole party would follow him, even if doing so would insure their destruction.

The sun went down about the time Tom and his friends left the stable, and the darkness set in with the suddenness peculiar to tropical climates.

So that a few minutes after the Sepoy cavalry were encountered it was difficult to distinguish objects.

But the starlight enabled Tom and his comrades to keep in the road, and they continued their flight with unabated speed.

Mile after mile was passed, but the pursuers did not give up the chase.

At length a large fire came suddenly in sight, some two hundred yards distant.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, urging his horse forward, "there are our friends at last."

"Stop, Sahib! It the name of the holy prophet, stop!" exclaimed Hamet, "they are enemies."

Hamet was right.

The rallying notes of a bugle were heard, and a company of Sepoys could be plainly distinguished as they formed in line across the road in front of the camp-fire.

The Sepoys in front were so numerous that it would have been madness to charge them, and the pursuing cavalry were close at hand.

On either side was the impenetrable jungle, shrouded in stygian gloom, in whose depths lurked danger and death in a thousand forms.

Tom and his friends were caught, as it were, between two inexorable jaws which were closing to crush them.

CHAPTER X.

TOM TOPP SHOOTS A TIGER.

DANGER paralyzes the timid, but quickens the intellect of the brave.

Tom Topp had only a few seconds to deliberate, but in that time he determined that it would be courting destruction to advance or retreat along the highway.

"Let us take to the woods," he said, "it is only a chance."

As they approached the trees the keen eyes of Hamet discovered a small opening in the thick vegetation.

"There is a path," he said, in a low tone, guiding his horse towards it.

Following Hamet, the party entered the path leading into the trees and thick brushwood.

As they disappeared in the jungle, the cavalry which were pursuing them came along the road at a gallop, and were fired upon by the Sepoys drawn up across the road.

Then there was some shouting, which probably caused the two parties of natives to recognize each other, for the firing ceased.

The path was so narrow that there was only space for one horse to pass at a time.

Beneath the shadows of the trees the darkness was intense, so Tom and his comrades gave the horses their reins, and bending low to avoid the overhanging branches, dashed along at a venture.

A wild gallop was that night ride.

For miles they rode in Indian file beneath the gigantic trees, whose limbs showed like fanciful tracery against the starlit sky.

Aroused from their lairs by the noise, ferocious beasts of prey crept off, growling savagely, and serpents hissing fiercely, coiled themselves to strike, but before they could make the fatal spring the cavalcade rushed by.

Behind there was torture and death, in front the unknown.

Being uncertain whether they were pursued or not, no one thought of drawing rein, until a slight tinge of gray in the eastern sky and a chill in the air indicated that daylight was at hand.

The roars of prowling tigers which at intervals had broken the silence were no longer heard, and the only sound audible was the melancholy cry of the great horned owl.

The constant attention necessary to avoid being thrown from the saddle, when the horses leaped over the numerous obstructions in the path, had kept every one too fully occupied to admit of much conversation during the ride through the jungle.

As soon as they halted, and Tom ascertained that Flora Kelly had suffered no serious inconvenience from the long ride, he asked Hamet what had best be done.

But Hamet was completely at a loss, and did not know what to advise.

He knew that the public road which they had left led to the town of Baumeengant, but did not know anything about the locality in which they were.

After some little consultation it was determined to move forward cautiously until water was found, and then retire a short distance from the path and rest themselves and the horses.

About an hour's ride brought them to a clear, shallow stream, with a firm, sandy bottom.

"We had better leave the path here," said Tom, "and as water leaves no trail, let us ride down in the bed of the stream."

This suggestion was acted upon, but after proceeding some two hundred yards, their further progress was barred by a fall in the stream, below which there was a deep pool.

So the horses were allowed to drink, and then urged up the shelving bank into the forest.

The horses were unsaddled, but it was not considered safe to turn them loose to graze, so while Hamet was rubbing them down, Tom and Phil, with their swords, cut an abundant supply of the tall grass.

The steeds being thus cared for, Tom and Phil produced the provisions remaining in their haversacks, and the whole party made a hearty meal.

Every one was tired, so the saddle-blankets were spread on the grass, and Flora, Phil and Hamet soon fell asleep, while Tom kept watch.

The cool morning breeze had died away, and the air felt hot and suffocating.

The stillness of death pervaded the woods. Not a sound broke the solemn silence save the wild, unearthly cry of the great black monkey—a deep long-drawn "wooh! wooh!" which, rising suddenly and at long intervals, echoed among the hollow arches of the forest.

All nature seemed to be overpowered by the approaching midday heat.

Tom felt it a difficult task to keep awake, and several times found himself nodding.

Fearing that he might go to sleep, he went to the deep pool below the falls, which was about thirty yards distant, and bathed his face and hands.

Happening to glance back as he was wiping his face, he thought that he caught a glimpse of a brindled mass gliding like a snake across an open space in the bushes near the sleepers.

The object that attracted Tom's attention disappeared so quickly that he was uncertain whether he had seen anything or not.

The next moment, however, he saw the grim head of an immense tiger cautiously thrust out of the bushes.

The fiery green orbs of the striped monster were fixed on Flora Kelly, who was somewhat nearer to him than any one else.

Tom stood as though rooted to the spot, and a deadly fear thrilled through his heart, such as no danger to himself could ever have produced.

He was as if paralyzed, and incapable of speech or motion.

It was like a horrible dream, made more vivid by the intense feeling of reality there was about it.

How long Tom remained in this condition he did not know, probably not more than a few seconds, though it seemed like an age of torture.

Dragging its belly along the ground, the tiger moved with stealthy tread toward the sleeping girl.

At length the bloodthirsty creature is within springing distance of his intended victim.

His tail switches impatiently, his ears are laid flat upon his neck, and his whiskered lips are drawn back so as to show his long, gleaming tusks.

Glaring on the unconscious girl fiercely, the tiger gathered himself together for the fatal spring.

In another second Flora Kelly will be a mangled corpse.

But at that moment Tom recovers his powers, and quick as lightning draws his revolver, and fires at the tiger's head.

The ball took effect, causing the blood to flow copiously, but in nowise disabling the animal.

Uttering an appalling roar, he sprang past Flora Kelly and dashed with terrific bounds towards Tom.

Tom stood his ground until he fired two more shots, but when the tiger arched his back and lowered its head to spring on him, he leaped back, tripped and fell.

Just as Tom fell, the tiger dashed at him, as if thrown by the impetus of some projectile engine, passed over him, and fell into the pool below the falls.

Dyeing the water with its blood, the ferocious creature, though sorely wounded, started to swim back to the bank where Tom was.

But Tom was quickly on his feet, and before the savage brute could land, sent a ball through his brain; it struggled desperately to keep above water, but soon sank.

Flora, Phil and Hamet, who had been rudely awakened by the report of a pistol and the roar of the tiger, now came running to Tom's assistance, but were only in time to see the slain monster disappear beneath the water.

Flora Kelly turned pale when she was told how narrowly she had escaped a horrible death, and was profuse in her thanks to Tom for saving her life.

Tom and Phil were anxious to look at the tiger, so they cut some long poles, and succeeded in pulling it up to the shore, where Hamet went to their assistance, and they dragged it out on dry land.

The immense size of the tiger excited great surprise, and every one congratulated themselves that Tom had been so fortunate as to kill it.

Little did they imagine that Tom's achievement would put a party of human tigers on their track.

But at the very time they were examining

the huge brute, a native Shikaree, who had been following the trail of the tiger, was watching them from a thicket not far distant, and mentally calculating how much a band of Sepoys, who were camping in the neighborhood, would give him for guiding them to where the fugitives were.

After satisfying himself as to the strength of the party, and casting many longing glances at the horses, the Shikaree withdrew from the vicinity so noiselessly that he was not discovered, and started on his villainous errand.

CHAPTER XI.

MURDER MOST FOUL—IN A CRITICAL POSITION.

WITHOUT suspecting the danger that threatened them, Tom and his comrades remained where they were until the cool of the evening, then returned to the path and continued on their way.

After they had proceeded some five miles the path became wider, and they came in sight of a large house and out-house.

Dismounting and leaving their horses with Phil and Flora, Tom and Hamet crept forward through the bushes to reconnoiter.

There was a considerable clearing around the house, and Tom and Hamet stopped in the edge of the woods and examined the buildings closely, but did not see any living creature; the place seemed to be deserted.

Finally, Hamet told Tom to remain where he was and he would go to the house.

Tom objected to this, but Hamet insisted that if the place was occupied by natives they would not be likely harm him, so he was permitted to go alone.

Hamet hesitated when he approached the house, then drew a revolver, advanced, looked in the open doors and windows, and hastily retraced his steps.

When he got back to Tom his sallow face was of an ashen hue, and there was a wild, startled look in his eyes.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"The Sepoys," replied Hamet.

"Are they at the house?"

"No, they have gone."

"Did you see any one?"

"None but the dead."

"Any white people among them?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea when the Sepoys were there?"

"To-day."

"How do you know?"

"The bodies have not commenced to decay."

"Well, we must search the place for provisions, we are about out."

"The house has been plundered."

"No matter, there may be something left."

Hamet, however, was so much opposed to returning that he was left with Flora, and Tom and Phil went to the house.

When they reached it, they saw a spectacle horrible beyond description.

The occupants of the house had evidently been surprised and murdered before they could prepare for resistance.

Some had apparently been shot or cut down before they were aware of their peril, while others seemed to have been killed while attempting to escape.

Corpses were seen on every side, and the whole place smelled of blood—sickeningly.

Apparently none had been spared, for there were bodies of women and children among the slain.

In nearly every part of the house there were evidences of the brutal ferocity of the murderers.

Nearly all of the dead were horribly mutilated, and one man was found who had evidently been literally flayed alive. Large strips of skin dangled from him like a tattered garment.

Most of the slain were natives, but in a large room were found the corpses of a middle-aged man, that of a young woman somewhat younger, and those of two children, all of whom were white.

While in this chamber, Tom and Phil were startled by hearing something stir.

Revolvers in hand they approached an alcove at one end of the room, and drew back the curtain which hung over its entrance.

Lying on a low couch they saw a beautiful girl about sixteen years of age who was yet alive.

She was gagged with a pocket handkerchief, and her life's blood was slowly oozing from a deep gash in her faultless breast.

Tom removed the handkerchief from the poor girl's mouth, and her lips moved as if she would speak.

Tom and Phil leaned down their ears to catch the words, but the only thing they could hear was the breath gurgling through one fast-filling lungs like the sound of air bubbles forcing their way through water.

In vain she attempted to speak. There was a rattling noise in her throat, her jaws dropped, her eyes closed, her limbs, with a shuddering motion, stretched out to their full extent, and she was dead.

The two boys had seen much blood shed during the past forty-eight hours, and their lives had for days been in constant danger, but nothing had moved them so deeply as witnessing the death of this fair young girl.

Without a word they turned and left the alcove, their hearts filled with pity and a burning desire to avenge her.

Thinking that there might be some one else alive about the place, they went all through the house, but found no one who showed any signs of life.

The house had been plundered of nearly everything, and the rest of its contents in a great measure destroyed.

Mirrors were shattered into fragments, pictures slashed or torn out of their frames, and the furniture broken to pieces.

But in the pantry a quantity of cooked food was found untouched, for a Hindoo would starve before he would eat food which was prepared in a vessel that was ever used by Europeans or natives of a different caste from himself.

Anxious to get away from the house, Tom and Phil filled their haversacks with the provisions, and rejoined Flora and Hamet.

"Let us leave here," said Hamet, as the two boys mounted their horses.

Not wishing to alarm Flora Kelly, Tom and Phil rode on a short distance in advance, and talked in low tones of what they had seen at the house.

A short distance beyond the house the path forked, and the party took the right hand path, which seemed to be the plainest.

As they advanced the path grew wilder and wilder, and finally ended abruptly on the edge of an immense morass, through which there had once been a causeway—traces of which were yet visible—but it was now impassable.

It was utterly impossible to cross the morass, and it would have been madness to attempt to penetrate the jungle, and go around it, so there was nothing to be done except to go back and take the other path.

This had a depressing effect on every one, not so much on account of the distance they had lost—though that was at least five miles—but because it reminded them forcibly of the fact that they were wandering about without knowing which way to turn for safety.

Night, too, was near at hand, for they did not start from where they had rested until late in the day, and there were strong indications of rain.

As they turned back, the rumbling of distant thunder was audible; the horses pricked up their ears, and pushed onward with renewed vigor and alacrity.

A dull, gloomy gray color crept over the deep blue sky and the air appeared to change; it lost its elasticity and lightness, and became sultry and oppressive.

"Let us hurry and seek shelter," said Hamet, spurring his horse; "there is going to be a storm."

"I hope we won't be caught out in it," exclaimed Flora, urging her steed into a gallop.

"Why," said Tom, "you are not afraid of a little rain, are you?"

"Oh," she replied, "you don't know what an Indian storm is."

Away they scampered, though Tom and Phil did not clearly understand the nature of the danger they were flying from.

But they soon had reason to feel that the peril was great and imminent.

There was not a breath of air stirring, yet all nature—plants, trees, men and beasts—seemed to quiver and tremble with apprehension.

The whole animal world seemed to be in commotion, as if seized with an overwhelming panic.

As if by magic, the jungle which was lately

so silent, and apparently deserted, was now teeming with life.

Animals, snakes and birds were running, scampering and flying in every direction.

And on every side was heard the roars and howls of beasts, the chattering of monkeys, and the frightened cries of birds.

A cloud of inky blackness arose above the tree-tops, and a low, mysterious sound came sweeping from afar.

It seemed as though the elements were collecting their energies for some tremendous outbreak.

The horses, as though gifted with understanding, stretched out in a wild race, and bounded along with unflagging energy.

The house which they had lately passed was soon again in sight, and reeking with slaughter as it was, it was a welcome sight to every one.

Dashing up to the stable, which was to the rear of the house, the party hastily dismounted. Phil and Hamet remained to stable the horses, while Tom led Flora into the back door of the dwelling, and up-stairs into a room in which there were no dead bodies.

Phil soon joined Tom and Flora, and reported that Hamet intended to remain in the stable with the horses.

As he said this, the faint twilight was quenched in the darkness of midnight.

Then there was a vivid flash of lightning, a peal of thunder that seemed to shake the earth, and the tempest burst forth, crushing and destroying.

The house trembled like a leaf, and the sound of falling trees and the roaring of the blast was deafening.

Suddenly the hurricane ceased, and all was hushed; the change was so sudden, that it was startling and unnatural; it was like a pause in a battle.

"I wish we had a light," said Flora.

"Hist!" whispered Tom, "what is that?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"Listen."

The tempest now began to rage again, and mingled with the howling of the wind, and the groaning and creaking of the trees, was an indistinct sound like that of human voices.

"It's the storm."

"No. Keep still, I think I heard people talking."

There was a moment or two of breathless suspense, and then all doubt was at an end.

There were shouts, the patter of many feet, and a large number of men rushed tumultuously into the house to escape the rain, which just begun to fall in torrents.

Judging from their exclamations, the newcomers were much rejoiced at reaching shelter.

They spoke in Hindostanee, which Flora Kelly understood, and interpreted in whispers to the two boys.

"It's lucky we did not burn the house," cried one.

"Yes," replied another, "if we had to stay out in this storm we might be killed by the falling trees."

Then above the confused babble of many tongues and the clanking of arms which were being laid aside, an authoritative voice was heard saying:

"Strike a light, some of you, and throw the carrion out of doors."

"Bad luck to him," whispered Phil, "they're the same murdering villains that were here to-day."

The hands of Flora Kelly sought and found those of Tom and Phil, and she said in a low, firm voice:

"I want you both to promise me that you will kill me, rather than see me captured."

The two boys both remembered the condition in which they had seen the poor girl die in the morning. They returned the pressure of Flora's hand, and simultaneously replied:

"We will."

"But don't give up yet," said Tom. "We may get—Hush! there is some one coming."

Heavy steps were heard on the stairs, and then a light, which some one was carrying, shone under the door.

Tom, Phil and Flora stood shoulder to shoulder with a revolver ready cocked in each hand.

"Now for it," whispered Tom.

But the door was not opened. Two men passed by it, and entered an adjoining room.

Tom crept to the partition wall, and peered through a crevice in the thin partition.

His heart leaped into his mouth, and he

could scarcely repress an exclamation of astonishment.

The man who carried the light was John Croley.

He was dressed in the uniform of a Sepoy officer, and wore a turban on his head; but there was no mistaking that cruel looking mouth, and that hideous, solitary eye, having the glare of hell itself.

CHAPTER XII.

COLONEL KELLY AND CAPTAIN HELM.

A MORE hopeless condition than that of Colonel Kelly can scarcely be imagined; both of his arms were disabled, and his spirited horse rendered frantic by the pain of a slight wound, rushed off into the jungle.

The colonel scarcely thought his life was worth a moment's purchase, but he determined to stick to his steed as long as possible.

On dashed the frightened horse, tearing through thickets and leaping over rocks and fallen trees, as if he would never tire.

Colonel Kelly retained his seat with difficulty, and had hard work to avoid having his neck broken, or his teeth knocked out by the overhanging limbs.

Mile after mile was left behind, and yet the mad race was continued.

The spirit of a demon seemed to possess the horse. He burst through the interlaced vines and dense masses of thorny plants with unabated speed, making springs and leaps that more resembled those of a hunted deer than that of a horse.

Colonel Kelly was bruised and battered until he was sore all over. His body and limbs were stuck full of thorns, and nearly all his clothing was torn off.

More than once he was tempted to throw himself to the ground, and probably would have done so if he had not noticed that the horse was going towards the sea shore, straight as the crow flies.

"Confound you," said the colonel to the unheeding horse, "if you don't stop when you reach the beach, I'll risk a tumble on the sand anyhow."

The speed, no less than the difficult nature of the ground over which he passed, at length began to tell on the horse. The sweat poured off him, and he panted and groaned while he bounded along as if half wild with terror.

The colonel noticed these indications of distress and it gave him fresh courage, for he thought that the horse would soon be so dead beat that he could not go any further.

His career, however, was ended in a most unexpected manner.

Just as he was about to enter a patch of grass taller than a man's head, the horse planted his fore legs in front him, stopped suddenly as if he had run against a stone wall, and stood with outstretched neck, dilated nostrils and glaring eyes, trembling in every limb, and snorting with fear at some object he had encountered.

The suddenness with which the horse halted sent Colonel Kelly through the air, and deposited him on the ground in the position of a spread eagle, some yards in advance.

Thanks to the softness of the spot upon which he fell, the colonel was none the worse for his tumble. He at once drew himself up into a sitting position, and to his infinite astonishment found himself face to face with a man, who had apparently crouched in the grass for concealment.

Both were startled by the unexpected meeting, but fortunately there was still light enough for each to see that the other was white, and that had a tendency to reassure them; for at the time I write of, in India, the color of men's skins determined with almost unfailing certainty whether they were friends or enemies.

Colonel Kelly was the first to recover his presence of mind, and he asked:

"Who are you?"

"Captain Helm of the American merchant service," was the reply. "And you?"

"Colonel Kelly, late of the British Army, now in the civil service of the Honorable East India Company."

"Are you much hurt, colonel?"

"Both of my arms are disabled, and the right one is bleeding. I wish you would tie it up for me."

Captain Helm bandaged the arm as well as he could, and the colonel said:

"Thank you. Now if I could get a little water I would feel much better."

"There is water within two hundred yards

of us," replied Captain Helm, "but I have nothing to bring it in. Can you walk?"

"Certainly; but before we go I wish you would secure my horse or he may go away, and notwithstanding the scurvy trick he played me, I would hate to lose him."

The horse, however, looked as if he were much more likely to die than run away. He showed every symptom of extreme distress—flanks heaving, tail quivering, and legs tottering as if he could scarcely stand.

But to make matters sure, Captain Helm hobbled him with one of the bridle reins and then led the way to the water.

After Colonel Kelly had quenched his thirst he asked the captain how he happened to be where he was.

The reader is already aware of what happened to Captain Helm prior to the time Tom and Phil left him at the beach and went in search of water; his account of what occurred afterwards was as follows:

"A few minutes after the boys left me I fell asleep.

"When I awakened, a Sepoy was standing by my side punching me with the butt of a musket to arouse me.

"There was murder in the man's looks, and I at once seized hold of the gun and wrenched it from him.

"Startled by the suddenness of the act, he recoiled and drew his sword. I sprang to my feet and tried to shoot him, but the gun missed fire.

"Then he closed with me, and I got hold of his arm and kept him from using his sword.

"While we were struggling with each other another Sepoy, whom I had not seen, came out of the woods behind me and felled me to the ground by striking me a blow on the head with the stock of his musket.

"After I was down the villain bayoneted me; fortunately, the point of the bayonet struck against one of my ribs and glanced along it without penetrating deeper.

"The pain was so severe that I fainted, and as the wound bled freely, the Sepoys no doubt thought I was dead.

"When I again became conscious, I had presence of mind not to give any sign of life. The rascals had dragged me in the bushes and commenced to strip me.

"Just at that moment I heard the voices of Tom and Phil, who had returned and were searching for me.

"The Sepoys jerked up their guns and fired at them, but I suppose missed their aim, for they immediately started off in pursuit, and I fear the poor boys were overtaken and murdered."

"No," exclaimed Colonel Kelly, interrupting him, "the boys escaped, and I trust are now in a place of safety; but finish your story, and I'll tell you about them."

"I am glad to hear that the boys escaped," replied Captain Helm, "for braver or truer lads never lived. I have very little more to tell about myself. After the Sepoys left me I scrambled off into the woods, tore up my shirt, bandaged my wound, and staggered along until I was lucky enough to find this pool of water.

"After drinking my fill I felt much refreshed, and started off in search for food, as I was nearly famished.

"I heard you coming, and fearing you might be an enemy, hid in the grass; your horse did not see me until close to me, and then no doubt thinking I was a savage animal, stopped, which I dare say was a lucky thing for both of us."

When the captain concluded, Colonel Kelly gave a brief account of what had happened at his house; spoke in high terms of the conduct of Tom and Phil, and expressed himself as being confident that they, Flora and Hamet would readily reach a place of safety.

By the time the colonel finished it was quite dark, and Captain Helm asked:

"What shall we do now?"

"Get away from this place as soon as possible," replied the colonel. "It is dreadfully infested by tigers and panthers, and if we remain much longer, the scent of the blood from our wounds may cause some of these fly-by-night gentlemen to find us and make a meal on us."

He had scarcely ceased speaking when some dark shadowy-looking figures were seen gliding as noiselessly as ghosts through the bushes close at hand, and there was a burst of horrible, discordant laughter, immediately followed by fiendish shrieks of merriment.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Captain Helm, springing to his feet, every hair on his head standing on end, "what is that?"

"Quick!" replied the colonel, "take the revolvers out of my belt—I can't use them—and don't waste a shot, for there is life or death in every bullet."

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN CROLEY—OR THE DOOM OF THE DESERTERS.

SOME years previous to the time of which I write, John Croley—then a common sailor—stabbed the second mate of the vessel he was employed on, while she was lying at Calcutta, and escaped by swimming ashore.

Being afraid of remaining in Calcutta, Croley went up into the country, and finally reached Lucknow, the capital of Oude, which was then an independent state, ruled over by a native king, celebrated alike for his barbaric magnificence and ferocious tyranny.

Croley took service under the king, and by his shrewdness and boldness attracted the notice of his royal master.

Being entirely unscrupulous, Croley did not hesitate to embrace the Mahometan religion, after which his advancement was rapid, and he soon had a position of trust and importance at court.

In India, from time immemorial, it has been the custom of rulers and their officers to oppress and plunder the lower orders.

Croley was not slow to take advantage of the opportunities his position gave him, but began to unscrupulously enrich himself, and lived in a style that he had never before even dreamed of.

But the ordinary means of extortion did not long satisfy Croley's avarice, for his greed increased with his gains.

He formed a conspiracy with Bajee Rao, the king's treasurer, to appropriate to their own use a large amount of money which would otherwise have gone into the royal coffers.

This was a grievous mistake, as Croley soon found out to his cost.

He might have gone on plundering the common people with impunity, for if they complained they would have been answered by the bastinado.

But when the revenues of the king were touched, that was a very different thing.

Not that the indolent king, if left to himself, would have been at all likely to discover the peculation, for so careless was he about money matters, that when an account of expenditures was submitted for his inspection—written, as was customary, on a continuous sheet of paper—he had it measured with a yardstick, and approved it without any further examination.

But there were many about the court who regarded Croley's rapid advancement with jealousy, and were eager to bring about his downfall.

These disaffected persons soon discovered what Croley and Bajee Rao were about, and went to work to get positive proof, before bringing the matter to the attention of the king.

Bajee Rao got wind of what was going on, and hastened to secure his own safety by being the first to make a charge against Croley, upon whom he threw all the blame.

Though Bajee Rao did not hesitate to betray Croley, he did not desire his arrest.

For Crowley knew too many things of a damaging nature about Bajee Rao.

Croley was therefore warned of his danger, and saved himself by a precipitate flight to the British Possessions.

On reaching a place of safety, he sent back to Lucknow to have his property sold and the money brought to him.

The answer he received was prompt if not satisfactory.

His effects had been confiscated by the king, and a native woman whom he married in Lucknow, being thus left without support, was anxious to join him.

Having no desire to be encumbered with a wife, he had married for money and never cared for, Croley left the country.

The jewelry which he wore, and some money which he happened to have about him when he fled, enabled him to live in idleness for about a year, and then his necessities forced him to ship as a sailor.

He now felt like the man who killed the goose that laid the golden egg.

The recollection of what he had lost was like wormwood and gall to Croley.

The hardship and privations of a sailor's life caused him to continually curse and deplore the folly which led him to forfeit a position that enabled him to live in luxurious ease, and offered him every gratification his sensual nature craved.

He never ceased wishing to reinstate himself in the favor of the King of Oude, and kept himself well posted about Indian affairs.

At length an incident occurred which appeared to be a death blow to Croley's hopes.

The British added the kingdom of Oude to their other possessions, and the king, shorn of his power, was forced to take up his residence in Calcutta, and depend for his support upon a stipend allowed him by those who had taken possession of his territory, and appropriated to their own use its enormous revenues.

The next year (1857) the Sepoy mutiny broke out, and Croley's fertile brain at once devised several plans for taking advantage of the state of affairs.

Compared with the native population, the British in India were a mere handful, and Croley believed that they would soon be killed or driven out of the country.

But whether the mutiny succeeded or not, Croley knew that the King of Oude and other native princes would do their utmost to make it successful and pay liberally for assistance.

Being in New York city he went to Tom Topp's uncle, William Alston, with whom he had been engaged in certain transactions, and after some preliminary remarks, said:

"There is a chance to make a fortune out of this Sepoy mutiny."

"How?" asked Alston.

"By sending out a cargo of small arms and selling them to the King of Oude."

"He is in Calcutta, and to all intents and purposes a prisoner."

"I know it, but the kingdom of Oude is peopled by upwards of three millions of the most turbulent and warlike race in India. They will be heart and soul in this movement, and the king's agent will jump at a chance to buy improved arms for them."

"Oude is hundreds of miles from the sea."

"No matter; let the arms be landed on the coast, and the natives will take them and pay the money down."

"Would there not be great danger of the vessel being captured by a British cruiser?"

"Not if the affair is properly managed. All you have to do is to buy the arms, charter a ship, and place me in command; I'll attend to everything else."

Alston thought favorably of the enterprise, but he was not willing to trust Croley with so much money.

Therefore, it was determined that Croley should proceed to India and make the best terms he could for the sale of the arms, which Alston agreed to purchase within sixty days, freight a ship with them and proceed to the French port of Pondicherry in the southern part of India, and there await intelligence from Croley.

It was agreed that Croley should have one quarter of the profits, and he professed himself satisfied with the whole arrangement; but in fact, he was by no means pleased at the turn things had taken, for he intended to keep every copper he received for the arms, stay abroad and let Alston whistle for his money.

It was diamond cut diamond, or taking the character of the two men into consideration, perhaps it would be more correct to say, dog eat dog.

After the interview was ended and Alston was left alone, he said to himself:

"I know you a little too well, Mr. Croley, to trust you with my money."

While Croley, who was striding down the street, muttered under his breath:

"You think yourself very smart, William Alston, but if I get you ashore among the Sepoys you will be glad to give every cent you have to escape with a whole skin."

Alston furnished Croley with money to pay his way to India, but he gambled it off, and in consequence applied for and obtained the position of first mate of the Comet.

After deserting their comrades on the burning ship, Croley and his companions steered for the coast of India.

Having a sail as well as oars in the boat, and being favored with fair weather, they made the land in a little over twenty-four hours.

Running the boat up into a little stream, they landed, intending to supply themselves

with water and provisions, and then coast along until they reached a British port.

Fortunately for Croley, the Sepoys that captured him and his companions were acting as escort to Bajee Rao, who had been in attendance on the King of Oude, at Calcutta, but succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the British, and was on the way to Lucknow, with orders from his king to encourage and direct the rebellion among his former subjects.

Croley at once requested a private interview with Bajee Rao, told him about the cargo of arms to be brought, and proposed to give him a share in the profits if he would assist in disposing of them.

Bajee Rao, knowing that the arms were very much needed, and thinking their purchase would give him a chance to put a considerable sum in his pocket, interfered to save Croley's life.

But this was found to be no easy task, and if Croley had not satisfied the Sepoys that he was a Mohometan, they would have killed him.

As it was, he was spared on condition that he at once enlisted in the Sepoy army.

The rest of the boat's crew were stripped, led out one by one, shot down, and mutilated in the most horrible manner. So their dastardly behavior met with a speedy and bloody punishment.

Croley was too selfish to risk his own safety by uttering a word or stirring a finger to save his own comrades, and saw them executed without regret, for he believed that with them perished the secret of his desertion from the Comet.

As soon as the execution was over, Bajee Rao and his escort resumed their march, taking Croley with them.

Bajee Rao said that the money to pay for the arms would be furnished in Lucknow, and proposed that Croley should enlist enough men to carry it down to the coast and bring back the arms.

To this Croley agreed, and wrote a letter to William Alston, directing him where to bring his vessel, and Bajee Rao placed the communication in the hands of a native, with instructions to carry it to Pondicherry, and wait until he could deliver it in person.

Bajee Rao's escort were such a desperate set of cut-throats that they were as dangerous almost to their friends as to their enemies.

They paid very little attention to Bajee Rao's orders, and after the first day's march he turned the command over to Croley, who, he knew, had a strong will, great physical power, and a prompt, vigorous hand, ready to strike when necessary.

The Sepoys were at first disposed to grumble at this arrangement, for they expected that Croley would attempt to check their pillaging, but when they found that he was as ready to murder and plunder as any of them, they became satisfied with his leadership.

So the band of desperadoes marched onward, plundering and murdering all of the defenseless Europeans and not a few of the natives who came in their way.

And it was they who butchered the occupants of the house they were now in.

After completing their hellish work, Croley and his company marched some miles, when they were overtaken by the shikaree, or hunter, that saw Tom kill the tiger.

The shikaree told about Tom and his companions, and was anxious to have a sufficient number of men go back and capture them.

Bajee Rao was in nowise disposed to delay his march to Lucknow for the sake of killing two youths and a girl.

But when the two boys were described to Croley, a shiver ran through his veins—such as men are said to feel when others walk over their graves—and he insisted upon going back at once.

Croley evinced so much excitement and was so determined about the matter, that Bajee Rao, after being promised a satisfactory explanation, ceased to object.

Retracing their steps with the shikaree, Croley and his company were overtaken by the storm, and sought refuge in the house where Tom, Phil and Flora were.

When the storm commenced, Croley feared, and with good reason, that the trail of those he sought would be obliterated, but he had stumbled on the right scent just as a man occasionally finds in the dark what he looked in vain for during the daytime.

CHAPTER XIV.

DANGER.

FOR a moment or two after he had looked through the crack in the wall and recognized Croley, Tom Topp was too much excited to speak, then he whispered:

"Phil, as sure as you are alive, Croley is in the other room."

"The murtherin' villain," responded Phil, in the same tone, "I'd like to wather the ground wid his blood."

"Hush, let us hear what he says."

There were plenty of cracks in the partition, so the two boys and Flora Kelly had no difficulty in seeing and hearing everything that took place in the next room.

Placing a light upon the table, Croley and the native with him seated themselves opposite to each other.

"I tell you, Bajee Rao," said Croley, as if continuing a conversation that had been interrupted, "I must and will find Tom Topp."

"I don't understand," replied Bajee Rao, "how the capture of a boy can be of sufficient importance to detain us, when we should be hurrying on to Lucknow."

"It is to me."

"But we neglect the interest of the king by stopping."

"I can't help that—'self-preservation is the first law of nature.'"

"Surely you are not afraid of a boy?"

"As sure as that infernal storm is raging outside, he will be the cause of my death if I do not slay him."

"Who can escape his fate?" ejaculated Bajee Rao, who, like all good Mussulmans, was a fatalist. "But none are wise enough to know the future."

"I am warned by the past."

"How?"

"Listen. The moment I saw Tom Topp on shipboard, I felt that he suspected me of killing his father, and was following me."

"What made you think that he suspected you?"

"His guilty conscience," muttered Tom.

"I don't know," replied Croley, "but I did think so, and was tempted to chuck him overboard; I had dozens of opportunities to do it."

"Why did you not?"

"Because I was a fool, and he had the nerve and cunning of a devil; he acted so innocently, that I thought I was mistaken, until the ship caught fire."

"What did he do then?"

"Why, when everybody expected the vessel to be blown into a thousand pieces, and those who could not get into the boat were trying to find something to make a raft of, he brought my chest on deck and searched it."

"What good did that do him?"

"Dash him, he found his father's watch in the chest, and no doubt regards it as strong proof against me."

"Ah, indeed!" said Bajee Rao, as coolly and indifferently as if he was not perfectly satisfied of Croley's guilt.

"Yes," continued Croley, "I saw the watch in his hand; he held it up, and asked me where I got it. It was impossible for me to return and wring his neck, but I felt certain that he could not escape. He did, however, and I will not feel safe a moment until I put him out of my way."

Little did Croley imagine that the boy he spoke of murdering was watching him with a face now fiercer and feller than his own.

For as Tom Topp listened, all lingering doubts disappeared, and he felt certain that he saw before him one of his father's assassins. His fingers gripped his revolver as though they would sink into it, and it was with extreme difficulty that he refrained from stepping into the other room and shooting Croley dead.

"I don't wonder at your feeling uneasy," said Bajee Rao, in response to Croley's last remark, "but there are large interests at stake, and we must start for Lucknow by noon to-morrow, whether you find your man or not."

"I'll not give up the chase until I hunt him down. Ha! what is that?"

A sharp crack of a pistol was heard, quickly followed by another report, then there was a shout and the sound of horses galloping away furiously.

In an instant the lower part of the house was in an uproar.

The Sepoys, thinking that they were attacked, became panic-stricken.

But not knowing which way to fly, they seized their arms and there arose a tumult of orders, exclamations, oaths, and questions.

"The Feringhees are upon us!" exclaimed Bajee Rao, his eyes starting from their sockets, and his face turning an ashen hue.

"I think not," replied Croley, springing to his feet and moving toward the door; "but let us go down and find out what is the matter."

Bajee Rao followed him, but at the head of the stairs they were met by a Sepoy, with whom, after exchanging a few words, they returned to the room.

The Sepoy then told what had caused the alarm.

He and a companion had been sent to put the horses of Croley and Bajee Rao—the only ones of the party who were mounted—into the stable.

Owing to the darkness, the two Sepoys did not immediately find the stable, but when they did so, they were met at the door by a mounted man, who was just about to leave, leading several horses.

The Sepoys challenged him, whereupon he instantly fired, killing one of them, and then dashed off with the horses he was leading.

The other Sepoy fired, but did not stop the retreating man, who quickly disappeared in the darkness.

The Sepoy, fearing there might be other enemies in the stable, then returned to the house.

"Hamet is off," whispered Tom.

"An' it's meself that wishes we were wid him," replied Phil.

"Are you sure there was only one man?" asked Croley of the Sepoy, when he concluded his story.

"Yes, sahib."

"Was he a white man or native?"

"A native. I saw his face by the flash of the pistol when he fired."

"How many horses did he have?"

"He was riding one and leading three."

"That will do. Go down-stairs. Stop that chattering and have some torches made at once."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bajee Rao, after the Sepoy left the room.

"Search this building and the outhouses," replied Croley. "Ten to one the birds we are after are here and that it was their attendant with the horses."

"Sure an' it's lost entirely we are now," whispered Phil.

"If we were out of doors we might escape," replied Tom. "Let us try the windows."

Saying which, Tom felt his way along the wall to a window, raised it gently and with great difficulty pushed back the shutter, which was immediately slammed against the side of the house with a loud bang by the wind.

The noise sounded so loud to Tom that he expected some of the enemies would come to the room at once, but the uproar of the storm, which was still raging, was so great that the slamming of the shutter did not attract any attention.

The wind poured through the open window with a roaring sound, and something clammy swept against Tom's face.

He was startled, but grasped the object, and found that it was the branch of a tree.

His first idea was that he had found a means of escaping from the house, but almost immediately ascertained that the limb was too small and weak to support any one.

In the meantime, Phil tried the other window, but it was fastened down so that he could not raise it.

"It's no use at all—at all," he said; "we'll be jist afther breaking our necks if we jumped out, and the Sapoys wud capthur us aftherwards."

"There is a door on the side of the room," whispered Tom; "it may lead into another room, where the chances are better."

The door was close to the window that Tom had opened, and the two boys and Flora soon reached it.

Phil, who was in advance, turned the knob, opened the door, stepped through the doorway, and almost immediately said:

"Be jabbers, it's a bit of a closet, an' there's a ladder ladin' up above."

"Up with you," said Tom; "it probably leads to the scuttle."

Phil went up the ladder, and in another moment exclaimed:

"Sure, there's a trap door, an' I can't open it."

"Try—try your best," urged Tom; "it is our only chance."

"I've found the bolt, but it is rusted, an' divil the bit will it move."

"Pull—pull for your life! We have no time to spare; I hear men coming up stairs now, and they probably have the torches."

"It's no use; I've scraped the skin off av me fingers thryin'."

"Don't give it up; I'll keep the rascals off as long as possible."

"Thin I'd better come down an' sthand by yer."

"No—no," hurriedly whispered Tom; "keep working at the bolt, and you may save Miss Flora. There is no use to throw away a chance."

"I don't want you to throw away your life to save me," murmured Flora; "we had better stay together."

"That would be madness," replied Tom, pressing her hand; "go up the ladder, and when Phil opens the trap-door follow him; I'll join you as soon as possible."

Flora was disposed to expostulate, but Tom would not listen, and said:

"Not another word. Here they come—go at once if you would not throw away all of our lives."

With his sword in one hand, and a revolver in the other, Tom then placed himself in the closet door to face the coming danger.

Heavy steps were heard, approaching the door of the room that opened into the corridor.

A lurid glare as if torches shone through the transom light, and the next minute the door was thrown open.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE JAWS OF THE TIGER.

FOR an instant after the door was thrown open Tom saw the villainous faces of Croley and a group of Sepoys, then all was dark again.

The furious blast that blew in at the open window had put out the lights.

So suddenly were they extinguished that Tom was not observed.

"Go down and light the torches again," ordered Croley, "and some of you shut that window."

Tom heard some one walking across the room and then saw a dark form between him and the dim light of the window.

The man was almost within arm's length, and Tom lunged at him with his sword.

The keen blade passed through the Sepoy's heart, and without a groan he sank down dead.

"Why in the devil don't you shut that window?" roared Croley. "I believe the fool has lost himself. Let somebody else go and close it."

Again Tom heard a step and dimly discerned a figure between him and the window.

Tom made another thrust with his sword, but as he did so the Sepoy stumbled over the form of his fallen comrade, and the weapon penetrated his shoulder without inflicting a mortal wound.

Wild with terror and screaming with pain, the Sepoy scrambled back towards the door.

Startled by his cries, the Sepoys at the door, without stopping to reflect, fired into the room, killing the wounded man and shattering the glass in the window.

But to their astonishment the flashes of the guns failed to reveal the presence of any one in the room except the two Sepoys.

Just after wounding the second man, Tom hearing the trap-door raised, stepped back into the closet and closed the door after him.

Finding that he could not move the bolt, Phil braced his shoulder against the door and managed to raise it.

"Come along wid ye now, Tom," he said, "the way's clear."

Tom at once joined Phil and Flora, and found they were just under the roof of the house.

"An' what will we be afther doin' now?" asked Phil.

"There must be a scuttle opening on the top of the house—try and find it, and I'll stay here and keep any one from coming through the trap-door."

"What's ther good av bein' on top of ther house? Sure it wud be easier to jump out av a window than off ther roof."

"There is a veranda at the back of the house, the roof of which is very low, if we can

reach that we can climb down the posts or jump to the ground."

"All right, thin."

"I'll help look for the scuttle," said Flora.

"I wish you would," replied Tom. "Every moment is worth a diamond to us."

Flora and Phil then crept away on their errand.

Tom let down the trap-door, and laid himself flat on his stomach, facing it.

He placed his left hand on the end of the trap-door, so he could feel if it pushed up, and in his right hand, which rested on the floor, he held a cocked revolver, ready to fire at a moment's notice.

The superstitious fears of the Sepoys were excited by the manner in which their two comrades were killed, and they refused point blank to go into the room to close the window.

In vain Croley raved and swore—they answered him by saying:

"Go yourself if you are not afraid."

Croley did not much relish the job, but a sense of shame, and his eager desire to capture Tom Topp, who he now felt certain was concealed in the house, kept him from backing out.

So, mustering up his courage, he advanced into the room, whirling his sword around him to protect himself from attack, and closed the window.

Lights were then brought, and the Sepoys trooped into the room; Tom could distinctly hear them, while they examined the dead bodies, uttering exclamations of wonder and cries of rage.

Directly they came to the closet, and Tom heard some one coming up the ladder.

Then the trap-door was pushed up.

The first thing that Tom saw was a pair of dusky hands which raised the trap, then there appeared in the opening within six inches of the muzzle of his pistol the repulsive face of a Sepoy.

Tom pressed the trigger of his revolver, there was a flash and a report, followed by a despairing death-shriek, and the Sepoy, pierced through the brain, fell back dead among his startled companions.

For a short time there was quite a commotion among the Sepoys, then the trap-door was shoved up with the muzzle of a musket, and Tom wondered what was coming.

He soon found out.

A hand holding a pistol was thrust through the opening, evidently with a design of taking a chance shot at the person defending the trap-door.

But before the pistol could be discharged Tom sent a bullet through the hand, and its owner, uttering a hoarse yell, tumbled head-long off of the ladder.

"Judging from its color," muttered Tom, "I think that was Croley's hand, and I only wish that it had been his head."

"Come, Tom," said Phil, who had approached unobserved; "Miss Flora's found ther scuttle."

Thinking it well to take advantage of the confusion which his last shot had produced, Tom immediately followed Phil toward the scuttle.

It was well he did, for he had scarcely got off of the planks upon which he had been lying, when they were riddled by a volley fired from below. If Tom had remained where he was two seconds longer he would inevitably have been killed.

Throwing open the scuttle, Tom, Phil and Flora were soon out on the roof.

They found that they were on the front side of the house, and that it would be necessary to go over the ridge of the roof before they could reach the veranda.

The wind was blowing so that they could scarcely stand, and the roof was both steep and slippery.

But no time was to be lost, and they commenced the perilous ascent, keeping close to each other, in hopes that they might be able to aid one another.

They had not proceeded far before Flora's dress caught on a nail, and when she attempted to get it loose she slipped.

Tom and Phil, who were on each side of her, attempted to stop her, and the effort caused them to slip.

Once started it was impossible to stop, for there was nothing to hold on to.

They shot down to the eaves and plunged over, crashing through the shrubbery to the ground, which they struck with such violence that they were rendered insensible.

The Sepoys, hearing them fall, rushed out,

disarmed them, and bore them into the house, uttering savage yells of triumph.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW IT FARED WITH THE CAPTIVES.

IT was lucky for Tom, Phil and Flora that the thick shrubbery broke the force of their fall, and that they struck upon a flower-bed where the ground had recently been turned up and was soft.

Had they fallen upon one of the walks or where the soil was firm and compact they would have been killed instantly.

As it was the shock was so severe that when the Sepoys bore them into the house they showed no signs of life, and for some time afterwards their death-like swoon continued.

It was to this circumstance that Tom and Phil owed their escape from immediate death.

For if they had been conscious when brought into the presence of Croley—who was almost frantic from the pain of the wounded hand—he would have slain them at once.

But when he saw Tom Topp helpless and insensible Croley hesitated to take his revenge, not from any relenting feeling, but because the speedy death it was in his power to inflict appeared an inadequate punishment—a paltry revenge.

Croley felt that if he saw his enemy perish on the rack, or torn limb from limb by wild horses, that his burning thirst for revenge would hardly be slaked, and an easy, painless death be regarded as a thousand times too good for Tom.

Feeling thus, Croley determined to give Tom time to revive, if revive he would, and then put him to death in the most cruel manner that could be devised.

So Croley, after taking Tom's father's watch from his pocket, ordered the Sepoys to bind the two boys, and put them with Flora in the next room, and keep a guard over them.

The unconscious boys were at once bound hand and foot, then they and Flora, who was also insensible, were dragged into the adjoining apartment, and rudely thrown on the floor.

Owing to the fact that Flora's dress and skirts caught on the shubbery, she was not hurt as much as the boys were, and was the first to regain consciousness.

She moved toward Tom and Phil, to chafe their hands and foreheads to revive them, but the Sepoy guards sternly ordered her to stop.

After what seemed an age to Flora, who feared that they were dead, the two boys made some feeble movements and then muttered disconnected words, as if they were delirious.

Gradually their minds became clearer, but it was some time before they remembered what had happened, and even then did not at once fully realize their situation.

"Where am I?" Tom ejaculated. "Where is Miss Flora and Phil?"

"God be praised, he is alive!" exclaimed Phil. "Here we are, both av us, Tom, but it's tied I am, an' can't move."

At the welcome sound of Phil's voice, Tom, who was lying with his back to his two companions in misfortune, managed to roll over so as to face them, and inquired if they were much hurt.

"I feel very sore," replied Flora, "but I don't think I am injured much."

"It's ivery bone in me body that's broke, I'm thinkin'," said Phil. "An' how is it wid yerself, Tom?"

"I'm badly bruised, and half dead with thirst."

"An' so am I; it's completely kilt I am for ther want of a dhrop of wather."

Flora addressed one of the guards in Hindostanee, and begged for a little water.

But the Sepoy with a ferocious scowl replied:

"No water, make you all drink blood soon."

Flora commenced to tell Tom and Phil what the man said, when further conversation was peremptorily forbidden by the guard.

Bodily injuries almost invariably produce intense thirst, and Tom, Flora and Phil suffered more for the want of water than they did from their bruises.

Their tongues and throats were dry and parched, and the sound of the rain, which was now falling in torrents and pouring off the eaves, nearly drove them distracted.

Oh, to be out in the dashing rain! to feel the refreshing fluid pouring over them—soaking through them—and trickling down their throats.

But they were powerless, and could only clench their teeth and endure what they could not alleviate.

There were four Sepoy guards in the room, and they passed the time away by drinking arrack, a villainous liquor distilled from rice.

As the night deepened, so did their potations. In a few hours they were all drunk, and amused themselves by brandishing their swords dangerously near to the heads of the helpless boys and girl and by pointing cocked guns at them.

While engaged in this pleasant pastime, one of the Sepoys, either accidentally or intentionally, discharged his gun, and the ball just grazed Tom's head, cutting off a lock of hair, and buried itself in the floor.

Wounds in the extremities are of the most painful kind, and Croley suffered so much with his hand that he could not sleep.

Having no opiate, he endeavored to deaden the pain by pouring down copious draughts of fiery liquor.

While thus engaged, he heard the report of the Sepoy's gun, and thinking that some one had dared to balk him of his vengeance, rushed into the room hot with anger.

His face was swollen and inflamed with drink and anger, and his appearance was so frightful and loathsome that the Sepoys—drunk as they were—covered before him like whipped curs.

With furious oaths, Croley drove them out of the room, ordered them to send up some men who were sober, and then turned to Tom.

For some seconds, Croley, with a fierce greed in his eye, stood gloating over the helpless boy, and then said:

"So, you young rascal, I've got you at last."

Tom made no reply, and Croley asked:

"Who put you up to following me from New York?"

"I did not follow you," said Tom. "I came on the Comet by accident."

"That's a lie, and you know it."

"It is the truth. I never heard your name until I met you on board."

"How did it happen, then, that you searched my chest as soon as I left the ship?"

"The chest was brought up with other things to make a raft, and emptied to make it lighter."

"Bah! Tell that to the marines."

Tom paid no attention to the sneer, but said:

"I'd like to know how you got my father's watch!"

"I bought it," replied Croley.

"I don't believe it."

"How do you suppose I got it, then?"

"By murdering my father," replied Tom boldly.

Croley's face blanched as he heard this accusation, and his eye avoided Tom's, but it was only for a moment; grinding his teeth together, he said:

"You had better not say that again."

"I do say it," answered Tom, who believing that Croley intended to kill him anyhow, had no hesitation in saying what he thought. "A man who would leave his comrades to perish on a burning ship would not hesitate to commit a murder."

"Drat you! I'll stop that lyin' tongue of yours!" exclaimed Croley, furiously.

Saying which he drew a pistol, but before he could level it, Flora threw herself upon Tom so as to shield him, and said:

"For God's sake, don't murder him!"

"Get out of the way!" yelled Croley, "or I'll blow a hole through you!"

"Don't stop him," said Tom to Flora, "let the coward shoot."

"Not if I can help it," exclaimed Flora.

"He shall kill me before he does you."

Hardened as he was, Croley admired Flora's spirited behavior, and he did not wish to harm her.

As he could use but one hand, he did not attempt to pull her away from Tom, but called for some of the Sepoys to come and remove her.

It was some time before any one answered his call, for the drunken guard on getting down-stairs at once went to sleep without troubling themselves about sending others to take their places.

By the time the drowsy Sepoys, who were aroused by the sound of Croley's voice, made

their appearance he concluded to postpone killing Tom.

"Ha!" Croley muttered, "the young rascal came near cheating me out of half of my revenge; and if I had shot him, I never would have found out who put him on my track."

Croley did not speak to Tom again, but after giving the Sepoys instructions to guard the prisoners carefully, he turned to Flora, and with a hideous leer, said:

"I'll spare him for the present, my dear, for your sake, but if he does not tell me what I wish to know, to-morrow he dies."

Saying which, he turned on his heel, and left the room.

As soon as he went away, Flora asked the new guard for water, but which was again refused.

Though their minds were filled with the most dire foreboding, Flora and the two boys were so faint from thirst, and worn out by what they had gone through, that they soon fell asleep.

But their slumbers were troubled—haunted by horrible dreams—and unrefreshing.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE AND TERRIBLE CHASE.

CAPTAIN HELM took the revolvers, as directed by Colonel Kelly, and stood ready to use them at a moment's notice, but he did not know the exact nature of the danger that threatened him and his almost helpless companion.

The unearthly laughter, growls and howls continued, and the fiery eyes shifted from place to place, but their owners hesitated about making an attack.

"What are they?" asked Captain Helm.

"Wolves," replied Colonel Kelly, "jackals and Drumelgundies."

"Drumelgundies—what are they?"

"Laughing hyenas."

"I did not think that any of the animals you have mentioned were very likely to attack man."

"They are not, except when many of them are together."

"Their numbers are rapidly increasing. What shall we do?"

"Try to make our way to the beach."

"Had we better not get up into a tree?"

"I can neither climb nor hold on."

"I can help you up among the limbs and then tie you fast."

"We would not be safe from the leopards; they abound hereabouts."

"I don't understand how we would be any better off on the beach than we are here," said Captain Helm, who was still in favor of climbing a tree, for he believed that with the revolvers he could protect himself and companion from the leopards.

"We will find plenty of drift wood on the beach," replied Colonel Kelly, "and if we can get out of the jungle and start a fire, we will be comparatively safe."

"But won't the light betray our whereabouts to the Sepoys?"

"It may, but if we don't have it, the beasts will eat us before morning."

He had scarcely ceased speaking, when a tremendous roar, followed by another from an opposite direction, arose with fearful distinctness above the confused howling and growling of the animals near at hand, who shifted about uneasily, as if they scented danger.

"There!" cried the colonel, "the barking of the jackals has attracted the attention of two tigers, and they will soon make their appearance; let us be off at once, though I fear we have wasted too much time."

"Come on, then," answered Captain Helm, leading the way.

The wolves, hyenas and jackals—all the more readily, perhaps, because they were intimidated by the roars of the tigers—made way for them as they advanced.

They had not gone more than twenty paces before they heard some large animal rushing through the bushes toward them.

"Ha!" exclaimed Captain Helm, facing about with the pistols ready cocked towards the approaching animal. "There comes a tiger now."

"Get behind a tree," said Colonel Kelly, setting the example, "and don't shoot if you can avoid it; I think it is a rhinoceros; they are stupid creatures, and if they see nothing immediately in front of them, are apt to keep on without stopping."

The next moment the cause of their apprehension made its appearance in the shape of

Colonel Kelly's horse, which testified its pleasure at finding its owner by whinneying and rubbing its nose against his shoulder.

The well-conditioned animal, although completely blown by its wild race, had in a great measure recovered its wind, and being frightened by the roars of the tigers, and the cries of the other animals, sought human companionship and protection.

"Captain, this is fortunate," said Colonel Kelly; "help me to mount and get up behind me, and we can reach the beach before the tigers overtake us."

Captain Helm needed no second bidding; he lifted Colonel Kelly into the saddle, jumped on behind him, and in obedience to a touch of the heel the well-trained horse dashed off towards the sea.

For some minutes the horse sped onward at a gallop, and then the thunder-like roars of the tigers were again heard.

"They are on our track," said Colonel Kelly; "it's lucky that we have a good start, and that the woods are open."

"Can a tiger overtake a horse?" inquired Captain Helm.

"They can readily do so in a hilly country, or where there is a thick underwood, and you must remember that our steed carries double."

"We will hardly have time to make a fire, will we?"

"No, but there is a low sand island some three hundred yards from the shore; I have been to it often on fishing excursions; if it can be reached by wading at low water."

"I expect that the tide has commenced to come in by this time."

"No matter; we must get to the island some way or other. It is our only chance."

"Will we be safe there?"

"Not perfectly, for the tiger is a bold swimmer, and readily takes to the water. But they may not follow us so far."

The gleam of water was now seen through the trees, and in a few seconds the horse emerged from the woods on to the beach.

By a touch of the leg Colonel Kelly directed the horse in a diagonal direction to the shore, and then urged him into the water.

As Captain Helm suspected, the tide had commenced to come in, but the horse reached the small sand island, which was not more than twenty yards square, without swimming.

Colonel Kelly remained on the horse, but Captain Helm dismounted, saying:

"So far so good."

At that moment the tigers were heard roaring on the beach.

"There they are," said Colonel Kelly. "We will soon know what to expect."

They were not left in uncertainty long.

The savage animals, who could not be seen while on the beach, plunged into the sea, and the phosphorescent light of the waves breaking around them plainly showed that they were swimming toward the island.

"Take this belt from around my waist," said the colonel. "There are plenty of cartridges in it, and open fire as soon as the brutes come a little nearer."

The captain did as he was told, and rapidly fired shot after shot, but without stopping the two tigers, who were soon within fifty yards of the island.

"I'd better reserve my fire until they come to close quarters," he said.

"It would do no good," replied the colonel. "You might disable one of them, but the other would kill us in a minute. We must leave here."

"Leave? How?"

"This horse is a good swimmer and can carry me easy enough, and if you take hold of his tail he can pull you along."

This suggestion was acted upon at once, for for there was no time to be lost.

The frightened horse needed no urging, but readily entered the water and struck out toward the open sea.

"Where do you expect to go to?" asked Captain Helm.

"Straight ahead, if the tigers follow us," replied the colonel. "I'd rather drown than be eaten by them."

"So would I."

"Use your pistols if they come close to us; the cartridges are waterproof."

"All right; they are both loaded."

"The tigers may give up the chase when they get to the island."

But the savage creatures evinced no disposition to do so. They came out on the

island, ran across it, roaring hungrily, plunged into the water, and continued their pursuit.

They rapidly overhauled the heavily encumbered horse.

Holding on to the horse's tail with one hand, Captain Helm emptied the contents of one of the revolvers at the ferocious monsters.

Apparently the shots had no effect until the tigers were close at hand, when one of them, uttering a bubbling roar, sank, came up again, swam back to the island, and crawled out on it.

While Captain Helm was trying to draw another pistol from his belt, the other tiger approached nearly within arm's length, reared half its body out of the water, and struck at him savagely with its paw.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOOMED TO DEATH.

EARLY in the morning of the day following their capture, Flora, Tom and Phil were roughly aroused from their slumber by the Sepoys.

The bonds were removed from the feet of the boys, and they and Flora were carried into the room where Croley and Bajee Rao were.

The two men presented a strange contrast. Croley with his rough hair, beard of a week's growth, and heavy projecting under jaw, reminded one of a hungry wolf.

While Bajee Rao looked sleek, oily, and crafty as a fox, or serpent.

This proposition astonished Tom, but after a moment's hesitation, he replied:

"If there is any property to which I have a claim it has been kept from me by fraud."

"Just so," assented Croley, "and you had better make it over to me, and secure your safety and liberty."

"I don't believe you would let me go, and I would rather let the swindler who has the property keep it than to give it to you."

"What difference does it make to you who has the property if you do not get it yourself?"

"The property belonged to my father, and his murderer shall never touch a scrap of it if I can help it."



"Quick!" replied the colonel. "Take the revolvers out of my belt—I can't use them—and don't waste a shot, for there is life or death in every bullet."

The captain instinctively dived, and thus escaped the blow, otherwise he would have been killed instantly.

The descending paw of the tiger came in contact with, and tore some skin off the horse, causing it to plunge violently.

Colonel Kelly slipped out of the saddle, and as both of his arms were disabled, sank.

The horse being thus left to itself, swerved violently to one side and swam towards the shore, closely followed by the tiger.

Captain Helm came to the surface of the water in a few seconds, and when the colonel rose caught hold of him, and managed to keep his head above water.

For some seconds neither of them spoke, but when the tiger had got off some distance, Colonel Kelly said:

"There is no use for you to waste your strength by trying to save me; leave me to my fate, and you may manage to swim ashore."

"Never say die," replied the captain. "I can keep you afloat for some time, and will stick to you to the end. Help may come when we least expect it."

Though the captain spoke thus cheerily he felt in his heart that their condition was well-nigh hopeless.

Fixing his sullen, blood-shot eye on Tom, Croley said:

"Tom Topp, will you tell me who instigated you to follow me?"

"No one," replied Tom.

"That won't do."

"It is the only answer you will get from me."

"You know the consequences if you persist in that reply."

"I do, and defy you."

"I'll make you change your tune before I am through with you."

"Do your worst; you may kill me, but you cannot scare me."

"I don't wish to frighten you, but on certain conditions will set you at liberty."

"Name them."

"In the first place you must give me this information I asked you for."

"You have your answer to that," broke in Tom, "and if you question me until doomsday, I can give you no other reply than that no one sent me after you."

Without heeding this interruption, Croley continued:

"And in the second place, you shall execute a paper, transferring to me your right, title and interest in all property, whether the same be in New York or elsewhere."

Croley's brow darkened, and he growled out:

"You had better mind what you say."

"I know what I say," replied Tom, "and mean every word of it."

"I'll not bandy words with you any longer; we march at twelve o'clock to-day, and if you do not comply with my demands, at eleven o'clock I will have you skinned alive, and Phil Fitzgerald shall share your fate."

Bajee Rao was struck by the beauty of Flora Kelly, and ever since she came into the room had kept his wicked eyes fixed on her.

As soon as Croley ceased speaking, he asked:

"How about the girl?"

"I'll attend to her," replied Croley; "she must not die—not yet, at least."

"You don't expect to dispose of all the prisoners, do you?"

"Certainly; they are all mine."

"The girl is not; you never saw her until she was captured."

"None of them would have been taken if I had not insisted on turning back."

"I don't intend to waste my time for nothing; you can do what you please with the boys, but I'll have the girl."

Croley felt certain that as to the division of prisoners the Sepoys would side with Bajee Rao, so he said:

"We can't both have her; let us draw lots for her."

Bajee Rao objected to this, and the dispute was waxing hot, when it was interrupted by a loud hubbub down-stairs.

In a minute or two the cause of the disturbance was explained by several strange Sepoy officers, who came up-stairs and into the room.

They stated that they were in command of a company of mutineers who were on their way to Oude, and wished to join their force to that of Bajee Rao and Croley.

As this arrangement gave strength to the party, and added to their safety, it was of course at once assented to.

The new-comers were in part composed of

He struck up the muzzle of the pistol as it was discharged, and the ball buried itself in the ceiling of the room.

In another moment Flora was disarmed and her hands tied.

Bajee Rao had no idea of handing Flora over to Nina Sahib, nor did his assertion to that effect deceive Croley for a moment; but about that subject they did not deem it prudent to exchange any words, even when they were alone.

Flora begged for some water, and Bajee Rao ordered a Sepoy to supply her and the boys with water and food.

They were carried back into the room, and then given a little boiled rice and water.

"Tom," said Phil, "what did Croley mane

At eleven o'clock Croley came into the room, and Tom told him what he was willing to do.

"I have no power to dispose of the girl," answered Croley.

"Then send Phil; you can do as you please with him," said Tom.

"As soon as you sign the paper, and tell me who sent you after me, you may both go."

"No one sent me, I tell you, but I will sign the paper after Phil is safe."

"Then I'll have him released at once."

"Yes, and murdered before he has gone half a mile."

"My men shall not molest him, but after he gets away from them he must take care of himself."

"I won't take your word for anything."



The trap-door was pushed up, and there appeared in the opening, within six inches of the muzzle of his pistol, the repulsive face of a Sepoy.

the men who attacked and burned Colonel Kelly's house.

They were sore over the rough manner in which they were handled; some of them recognized Flora Kelly, and they at once clamorously demanded that she should be given up to satisfy their vengeance.

"Ha-ha," chuckled Croley, sardonically, "we are about to have the prize taken from between our very teeth."

But Bajee Rao was equal to the occasion, and said:

"The maiden is intended for the zenana of His Highness Nina Sahib; let him who dares touch her."

Nina Sahib, the powerful Mahratta chief, who was at that time known to be engaged in besieging the English at Cawnpore, was feared by the natives throughout India.

At the sound of his dread name, the Sepoys hushed their clamor and protested that as that was the case, they had no desire to molest Flora.

The conversation was carried on in Hindostanee, but Flora understood every word of it.

On hearing the horrible fate designed for her, she made a sudden spring, grasping a pistol which was lying on a table by Croley, clapped it to her head, and pulled the trigger.

Croley, however, was as quick as she was.

whin he talked about your property? You told me you had nothin' at all."

Tom had been thinking about this very subject, and he replied:

"I don't know myself; but I'll tell you what I think."

"What?"

"You noticed that Croley insisted that some one put me up to follow him."

"Yis."

"Well, he no doubt believes that the person who swindled me out of my father's property put me on his track."

"I'm thinking that you are right."

"And he wants to get even with the man who he thinks betrayed him, and fill his pockets at the same time."

"But you'll not give him ther paper?"

"I believe I will."

"An' perhaps you're thinkin' of doin' it ter save me, an' I don't want yer to be afther doin' that."

"He must first send you and Miss Flora to a place of safety, and then I will sign the paper."

"Thin, if he is afther playing yer false, I'll get even wid him."

"Exactly. And if I get away, a paper, extorted from me by threats, will not be worth anything."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want Phil sent to the nearest English post, and when I receive a note from him that he is safe I'll do what you wish."

"That is impossible; none of my men will venture to go where the English are, and if they would, I have no time to wait for them."

"Then that ends the matter as far as I am concerned."

"Is that your final determination?"

"Fixed as fate."

"Then you had better say your prayers."

"For God's sake spare them!" pleaded Flora.

Without paying any attention to her Croley turned to the Sepoys, and said:

"Take these two boys out into the yard, strip them, tie them up, and get your knives ready."

The order was obeyed, and by a refinement of cruelty the two boys were tied to trees close together, and in such a position that they could witness each other's sufferings.

A Sepoy, with an expression of ferocious joy on his countenance, and a newly-whetted knife in his hand, stood by each of the doomed boys ready to commence their horrid task.

"I'll give you one more chance," said Croley to Tom. "Speak quick, or it will be too late."

Tom looked the villain in the eye without flinching, and replied:

"You have my answer."

"Go ahead," said Croley to the two executioners, "and mind you don't cut any large blood vessels. I want them to die by inches."

Seizing hold of the boys, the Sepoys drew the knives lightly across their backs from one shoulder to the other.

Thin red lines from which the blood oozed indicated where the keen blades had passed, and showed that the flaying alive—one of the most terrible modes of inflicting death ever invented by the devilish ingenuity of man—had fairly commenced.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE MARCH—PARTING WITH FLORA.

Tom and Phil gave themselves up for lost, and bade each other good-bye.

But they were respited in the most unexpected manner.

Just as the bloodthirsty Sepoys commenced to skin them, some Ryots* made their appearance and announced that a battalion of British troops were near at hand, advancing towards the place.

In a moment all was bustle and confusion, and many of the Hindoos evinced a strong disposition to take to their heels at once.

Croley's energetic language, however, in some degree quelled the panic, and induced the Sepoys to prepare to move in an orderly manner.

Tom and Phil were unbound, and ordered to dress themselves.

As soon as they put on their clothes their arms were pinioned, but their legs were left at liberty.

It was fortunate for Tom and Phil that the flaying operations had not extended beyond the two incisions just through the skin of their backs—the bleeding of which was speedily checked by coagulated blood—and that the slight wounds were covered by their clothing, for otherwise the torrid sun of India and the flies would have played the mischief with the cuts in a few hours.

A dooly (a kind of native palanquin), found in one of the out-houses, was appropriated for Flora's use, and the Ryots, much against their will, pressed into service as bearers.

This consideration and attention was paid to Flora because after she was declared to be designated for the zenana (harem) of Nina Sahib, her person was held too sacred to be exposed to the common observation of the natives.

So, in this instance, at least, good came of evil, for if Flora had been forced to make the march that followed on foot, or even on horseback, she would have suffered severely, and in all human probability lost her life.

In less than ten minutes after the alarm was given, the Sepoys, with their prisoners, were in full retreat.

Striking off at a right angle from the road, they hurried through the jungle toward a low range of hills not far distant.

On reaching the hills, the Sepoys immediately ascended one of them, the horses of the mounted men choosing their steps, and scrambling like goats over the broken ground.

The hill was heavily timbered from base to summit, and when the Sepoys arrived at the top, they halted in the thick woods, which effectually screened them from observation.

In a few minutes the column of British troops appeared marching along the road.

Tom was in hopes that they would pursue his captors, but in this he was disappointed, though some of the advance guard turned aside and stopped at the house.

They, however, soon rejoined the main body of troops, and continued on their way.

They were evidently in haste, and the spectacle of a murdered family and plundered home was at that time too common to detain or turn them from their course.

Afraid to return to the highway upon which the British troops were marching, lest they might be encountered unexpectedly, Croley and Bajee Rao cut across the country to another road, and then continued on their way to Oude.

By the advice of Bajee Rao, with whom he conferred during the day, Croley determined that instead of putting the two boys to death at once, he would try and break the spirit of Tom and make him do as desired, by subject-

ing him to the toils and privations of a long march.

Owing to the enervating climate of India, which renders long continued exertion impossible, this plan was well calculated to reduce Tom's mind and body to a state of helplessness.

Tom and Phil, of course, received no intimation of Croley's intentions, and at every halt they expected to be put to death.

From the natives along the route it was ascertained that troops were being hurried forward from all quarters to reinforce General Havelock, who was making preparations to raise the siege of Cawnpore.

Being in constant dread of coming in contact with some of the troops, Croley and Bajee Rao with their command advanced with the greatest caution, and by the most unfrequented roads.

The suffering of Tom and Phil during the march was almost incredible.

The heat was most intense, the sun blistered their hands and faces into masses of pulp; the pain was terrible at first, but the skin peeled off in a few days, and their complexions became almost as dark as that of the natives; afterwards the sun did not affect them so much.

The Sepoys who were not mounted when the march commenced speedily provided themselves with steeds, by appropriating horses belonging to the natives along the route.

Tom and Phil, however, were forced to keep up with the column on foot, and if they did not walk briskly, were beaten unmercifully, or tied to the tails of horses and dragged along.

Nor was the ill-treatment which they received from their guards all they had to endure. The natives in the villages through which they passed loaded them with abuse and pelted them with mud and filth.

In fact, such was the animosity of the country people that but for the interference of the Sepoys Tom and Phil would have soon been torn to pieces.

After two or three days passed without Croley evincing any disposition to put them to death Tom and Phil began to hope that they might escape, and this idea raised their spirits and aided them to endure the hardships to which they were subjected.

In the meantime Flora, who was borne along in the dooly on the shoulders of Ryots, traveled with considerable comfort, though of course she was very much distressed about her captivity and the fate which she was told awaited her.

Occasionally the two boys managed to walk by the side of the dooly and talk with her, and these conversations, rare and short as they were, had a very cheering effect on all of them.

Tom and Phil were made to march in the midst of the Sepoys, and at night a special guard was placed over them; so carefully were they watched that days lengthened into weeks without their having the slightest chance of escape.

But they did not despair. They were constantly on the alert, ready to take advantage of any chance which might offer to regain their liberty.

The state of the country through which they passed was deplorable in the extreme. Villages were being burned and plundered daily. The roads deserted, and no man's life or property was safe for a moment.

In the disturbed territory there were some few districts—under powerful talookdars and zemindars*, who took no part in the rebellion—which were calm and peaceful, but all the rest of the country was subject to fire and sword.

Nearly every day Croley tried to argue or bully Tom into acceding to his demands; but Tom was deaf alike to persuasion or threats.

Experiencing great difficulty at first in communicating with their guards, Tom and Phil set themselves industriously to work learning Hindoostanee, and soon acquired a sufficient knowledge of the language to understand what was said to them, and express themselves pretty plain.

The further they advanced into the interior of the country, the more complete was the desolation found to be.

Near the villages it was no unusual thing to see a number of persons hanging by the neck on trees, and human heads exposed on poles.

Along the wayside, corpses in various stages of decomposition were numerous, some of them scarcely yet cold, while others were little more than grinning skeletons, to which clung a few shreds of putrid flesh.

The stench was terrible, and scarcely a sound was borne on the tainted air save the cries of unclean beasts and birds that tore to pieces, fought over, and fattened upon the loathsome remains.

After the command had marched for some weeks in a northwestern direction, the sound of heavy guns was heard at night when everything was quiet.

Tom and Phil learned from the Sepoys that the guns were fired by the besiegers and defenders of Cawnpore.

The next afternoon the river Jumna was reached, and crossed in boats.

A march of a day and a half further brought the command to the banks of the Ganges, where the sound of the firing at Cawnpore could be heard with great distinctness.

Some of the natives reported that General Havelock, with a portion of the British army, as at Allahabad; others said that he had left that place and was advancing towards Cawnpore.

Unable to get any reliable information, and thinking that at any moment they might be called on to fly for their lives, Croley and Bajee Rao determined to send Flora Kelly and the baggage of their command to Cawnpore by water.

It was, however, difficult to find any boats, and it was not until late in the afternoon that some small ones were procured.

In the meantime, Bajee Rao wrote a very flowery letter in the Oriental style, begging Nina Sahib to accept Flora, magnifying his own services, and saying very little about Croley.

Bajee Rao gave his letter to the commander of the guards who were going with the boats, and chuckled to himself at having gained a march on Croley.

But Croley was wide awake, and outwitted the cunning Hindoo very cleverly. Under pretense of giving some parting instructions, he went on board of the boat where the officer was, privately got possession of Bajee Rao's letter, and substituted one that he had written himself.

By a strange combination of circumstances, which no one dreamed of, much less foresaw, this act of Croley's, for a time at least, saved the life of Flora. Had Bajee Rao's letter gone to its destination, she would in a few days have been a corpse!

By a refinement of cruelty, Tom and Phil were kept from approaching Flora to bid her good-bye, but with her hand she waved them a mute farewell, and they replied in the same manner.

Everything being in readiness, the boats were shoved off from shore, and propelled by lusty rowers, darted swiftly over the surface of the turbid stream.

Tom and Phil watched them until, after dwindling to mere specks in the distance, they shot around a bend in the river and vanished.

The two boys were very sad when they turned away from the river, and their spirits were not improved by hearing the harsh voice of Croley, who had been standing near at hand watching them.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled, "you did well to take a long look; you will never see her again."

Neither Tom nor Phil made any answer, but turned from the villain with feelings of contempt and detestation too deep for words.

CHAPTER XX.

SIKHS AND SEPOYS—DEATH IN FRONT AND REAR.

Now that he was within two days' march of Cawnpore, and probably at no great distance from the British army, Croley felt that it was necessary to use double caution.

He knew that the appearance of his command on the bank of the Ganges was more than likely to be noticed, and that there were plenty of Hindoos who, in hopes of being rewarded, would convey intelligence of his whereabouts to the British, if they were not too far away.

Therefore, though it was late in the afternoon when the boats left, Croley determined to march a few miles before encamping for the night.

* Peasants—cultivators of the soil.

* Native chiefs.

This design was at once put into execution.

Striking into an old abandoned road, overgrown with grass and weeds, the company moved in a diagonal direction from the bank of the river.

After proceeding some five miles, they camped at the foot of a rocky hill, over a ledge of which the waters of a bold stream fell into a deep pool, and then flowed off toward the Ganges.

It was a wild and lonely spot, and there was no sign that it had been visited by human beings for a long time.

As evening advanced, swarms of huge vampire-bats,* which hung in clusters suspended by their claws, head downwards, from the branches of the trees, dropped one by one, and glided away on noiseless wing.

Now that the heat of the day was over, the wild creatures in the jungle began to stir, and the shrill call of the wild peacock and other sounds were heard.

The short twilight of the tropics passed, night, dark and intense, set in, and the cries of wild animals rang out with terrible significance near at hand.

The appalling roar of the tigers, at intervals, mingled with the long-drawn howl of the wolf, the bark of the jackal, and the laugh of the hyena.

As soon as the Sepoys had cooked and eaten their suppers the fires were extinguished, lest they should attract the attention of the enemy.

The encampment was supposed to be sufficiently protected on two sides by the hill and the stream, on the other sides strong pickets were posted, to guard against a surprise.

But, notwithstanding these precautions, and the loneliness of the place, neither Croley nor his men felt safe.

Being without fire, they feared the attacks of savage animals, but what caused the most uneasiness was the howling of jackals that seemed to answer each other.

Hindoos, when on thieving or warlike expeditions at night, commonly imitate the howling of jackals, and give signals to each other by means of these cries.

Therefore the Sepoys were apprehensive that the sounds were made by hostile natives preparing to attack, or guiding British troops to surround the camp.

Very few of the Sepoys slept soundly, but the night passed without disturbance.

Next morning, however, just at daylight, a body of men who had crept down to the opposite edge of the stream fired point blank into the camp, and at the same time the outposts were attacked furiously and driven back on the main body.

Aroused suddenly from sleep by the murderous volley, and finding themselves surrounded on three sides by an enemy who kept up a brisk fire which did considerable execution in their ranks, most of the Sepoys, without waiting for orders, snatched up their guns, and with the agility of mountain goats fled up the side of the hill and sought shelter among the rocks.

Tom and Phil hoped that they might escape during the general confusion, but they were secured and carried off by Croley, who, with a few of his most determined men, for a short time held the assailants at bay, and covered the retreat.

In hopes of saving their horses, Croley and the handful of men who stood by him fought stubbornly; but they were outnumbered and forced to retire up the hill—the only direction in which retreat was practicable—until they had passed the top of the falls, and were some fifty yards further up the stream.

At that point there was a level place covered with rocks and trees, and on one side of it was a perpendicular fall of some forty feet to the surface of the stream.

It was an admirable place for making a sturdy defense. This Croley noticed with the eye of a soldier, and the quickness of a man whose life is in peril.

Placing his men behind the rocks, and being reinforced by a portion of the Sepoys who had been rallied by Bajee Rao, he made a stand, and repulsed his pursuers.

This success enabled Croley to collect the greater part of his command, and post them at the most advantageous points to defend his position.

Bajee Rao, with some twenty-five men, was

* Flying fox of India; length of body one foot, expanse of wings, five feet.

stationed a short distance back of the main body to act as a reserve, and to guard the rear.

With this reserve Tom and Phil were placed, and told if they made the slightest motion to escape, they would be shot down.

The boys were astonished not to see any white men in the attacking party, and inquired of a Sepoy who and what they were.

"They are Sikhs," was the reply.

"And what are Sikhs?" asked Phil.

"Robbers and murderers who spare no one."

"Be jabbers!" said Phil to Tom, "it's very little we need be after carin' how ther foight goes."

The Sepoys did the Sikhs great injustice. They are a fighting race of Mohammedans, who took service under the British, and for the most part remained true to their salt during the mutiny. But it is not to be denied that some of them took advantage of the disturbed condition of affairs to do more or less plundering on their own account.

Of this, however, Tom and Phil knew nothing, but they could not help seeing that the Sikhs were brave and obstinate fighters.

Undismayed by their repulse, they renewed the attack as soon as they were reinforced by those who fired into the Sepoy camp from the opposite side of the stream.

Tom and Phil were where they could see everything that transpired, and the scene was so exciting that they recklessly exposed themselves to the flying bullets, poured in their fire at short range, and without stopping to reload, threw themselves furiously upon the Sepoys.

The hand-to-hand fight that followed was not very long, but very bloody.

Only a few of those engaged had pistols, and the combat was chiefly with the sword and bayonet, weapons which are not noisy, but very deadly.

There was no chance for strategy; every man stood on his individual merits and personal prowess, quarter was neither asked for nor given, and all was blood and death.

Believing that their lives depended on holding the position, and encouraged by Croley, who fought like an incarnate demon, the Sepoys displayed a degree of intrepidity nothing could overcome.

The Sikhs fought like wolves, with less order than valor; they poured out their blood like water, but the nature of the ground was such that they could not bring their strength to bear, and were beaten in detail.

But so obstinate and protracted was the struggle, that when they fell back carrying off their wounded with them, they left at least fifty of their number on the hillside dead, three-fourths of them in a space that might have been covered by a dozen blankets.

Nor did the Sepoys escape scathless; twenty of them were killed outright, and many more wounded, some of them desperately.

Croley endeavored by threats and entreaties to induce the Sepoys to charge the Sikhs as they fell back, and recover the horses of the command.

But the beating of Sikhs was so defiant, and the Sepoys had been handled so roughly, that they refused positively to advance a step.

Perhaps the Sepoys were right, for they soon had reason to know that their antagonists were by no means disheartened by their repulse.

After retiring down the hill, the Sikhs remained quiet for about an hour, then from the heavy timber, which afforded them excellent cover, opened a fire which was so well directed that several Sepoys who exposed themselves paid for their temerity with their lives.

The provisions of the Sepoys were captured when they were driven out of their camp.

Knowing that hunger would soon force them to abandon their position, Croley ordered two of his trustiest men to go some distance to the rear, and ascertain if it was practicable to retreat in that direction.

The two men had not proceeded more than two hundred yards when an ambushed foe fired upon them, killing one and wounding the other, who, however, managed to get back to the command.

The intelligence that they were surrounded on all sides completely demoralized the Sepoys.

But Croley, on finding that he was in a trap from which there appeared to be little probability of his escaping, raged like a chafed bear.

One thing he quickly determined on, and that was, come what might, he would not be baffled in wreaking his vengeance on Tom Topp.

But even then, when there was scarcely the ghost of a chance that information or paper would be of any use to him, Croley resolved, if possible, to induce Tom to comply with his demands, before destroying him.

After ordering six Sepoys to be ready with their guns loaded, Croley directed that the two boys should be brought before him.

Tom and Phil were brought, and by Croley's orders placed on the edge of the level space, where it fell abruptly to the surface of the stream, which flowed dark and swift some forty feet below.

In front of the boys, at a distance of ten paces, the six Sepoys with their guns were drawn up in line.

"Phil," whispered Tom, "this looks like an execution."

"That's phat I'm thinkin' meself," replied Phil, in the same tone.

"If that is what they intend let us jump into the water."

"Say whin, thin; it's all one; we'll be killed, after all."

Further conversation was prevented by Croley, who, taking a position a little to one side, said:

"Tom Topp, I do not intend to be trifled with any longer, and I ask you for the last time to tell me who sent you after me?"

"No one," replied Tom.

"Is that your final answer?"

"It is."

"Will you sign a paper giving me your right and title to all property you have a claim to?"

"No—a thousand times no!"

"Then your blood be on your own head. Ready!"

The ominous clicking of six gun-locks was heard as the Sepoys drew back the hammers.

"Aim!"

Six gaping muzzles covered the boys.

Croley had made many threats which he did not execute, but now Tom saw murder in his face, and yelled out:

"Jump!"

"Fire!" roared Croley.

Under the impulse of the moment several of the Sepoys discharged their guns, but it was too late, and their bullets only pierced the empty air.

The instant that Tom gave the word the two boys with lightning-like rapidity wheeled and sprang off of the bluff.

Down they shot, feet foremost, from the dizzy height into the dark waters, which parted to receive them, and closed over them with a gurgling sound.

After a moment of breathless astonishment Croley uttered a horrible oath, rushed to the verge of the bluff with the Sepoys, and peered eagerly into the stream.

At first nothing was visible, then two dark objects came whirling to the surface of the water close to the falls, over the top of which they were instantly swept, and vanished.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPE.

BOTH Tom and Phil were expert swimmers, and had frequently leaped and dived off of spring boards and other elevated objects.

Habit is second nature; so when they sprang over the bluff they instinctively kept their arms close to their sides and went straight down, feet foremost.

Consequently they clipped into the water like sticks dropped end first, without much shock.

The rapidity of the descent, however, nearly took away their breath, and the impetus carried them so deep under water that for the time being they were incapable of any exertion.

The current was so swift that before they came to the surface of the water, they were swept close to the verge of the falls, so close, in fact, that there was only time to draw a long breath before over they went, and plunged down amid the seething, hissing waters in the deep pool below.

Fortunately neither Tom nor Phil struck upon any of the rocks at the foot of the cataract, but they were severely shocked by the

fall, and the down-pouring water carried them under, and kept them down so long, that when they came to the surface they were limp and almost lifeless.

Scarcely conscious of what they were doing, they floated on their backs and made some feeble motions, which luckily were sufficient to keep the refluxing water from carrying them under the falls again.

On one side of the stream at the lower end of the pool was a low bank or bar, formed by debris washed up by the current.

Against this bank Tom and Phil drifted close to each other, and managed to drag themselves about half out of the water; more they could not do, they were so weak and faint.

For a short time they were helpless as infants, but no bones were broken, and under the genial influence of the sun and air they regained their strength and wits with marvellous rapidity.

The first thing they did, and before they were strong enough to talk, was to grasp each other by the hand.

They were only able to give a short, weak grip, but between two such old and tried friends it spoke volumes.

Phil was the first to break the silence.

"May the Howly Vargin be praised," he ejaculated, in a low voice, "but it was a close shave entirely."

"It was, indeed," replied Tom; "but thanks be to God we are alive yet."

"But what will we be after doin'?"

"We must get away from here at once."

"It's meself that wants to do the same—but how?"

"Keep quiet, and let us make up our minds what to do."

And in truth their position made it necessary for them to act promptly and with extreme caution.

Where Tom and Phil were lying they were screened by the perpendicular rocks of the waterfall from the view of Croley and his men, who were fifty yards further up the stream.

But just to the right, and so near that the two boys could hear their voices, though not raised above an ordinary conversational tone, were the Sikhs, firing whenever they got a glimpse of the Sepoys.

The bank against which Tom and Phil were was so low, that if they stood up, even in a bent position, or attempted to cross the stream and get on the other side, they would inevitably be discovered by the Sikhs and captured, or what they thought more probable, be riddled with bullets at once.

While on the other hand, if they went along down in the stream, they would, after proceeding a few yards, be in plain view of Croley and the Sepoys.

All of these facts Tom and Phil weighed in their minds, and did it quickly.

For every moment of delay was fraught with deadly peril, as it was almost absolutely certain that some of the Sikhs would come to the pool below the falls, which they could do in perfect safety, to get water.

"The stream is our only chance," whispered Tom. "Do you feel strong enough to try it?"

"Yis," replied Phil. "An' sure it'll be 'asier ter go wid ther current than ter crape thro' ther thorns."

"Let us be off then; don't speak a word, and avoid splashing in the water."

Whereupon the two boys slid gently into the stream, and barely moving their hands and feet enough to keep them afloat, glided along noiselessly with the current.

They had not proceeded more than fifteen or twenty yards, when a shout announced that the Sepoys ensconced among the rocks had discovered them.

Tom and Phil at once commenced to swim as fast as they could, without making any noise, while Croley and the Sepoys opened a furious fire on them.

Whew! how the bullets whistled and sung around the boys' heads, knocking up the water in their faces, and in several instances passing so close that they felt the wind of the balls upon their cheeks.

It is, however, very hard to strike small, moving objects with plunging shot, and Tom and Phil increased the difficulty by diving repeatedly, and remaining and swimming under water as long as possible, coming up to breathe each time further and further down the stream.

Nor did the Sepoys have a chance to aim

and fire deliberately, for the Sikhs were not idle, but popped over several of those who in their eagerness to shoot the boys exposed themselves, and speedily drove the rest to cover.

Croley, however, furious at the prospect of Tom and Phil escaping, continued to expose himself recklessly, and fired shot after shot at them as fast as the guns could be loaded and handed to him.

In his insane desire to see them destroyed, he even shouted to the Sikhs to look to the stream, and tried to direct attention to the boys by pointing to them.

But the Sikhs supposed that he was firing at them, and thought his words and gestures were meant as a defiance, so they kept blazing away at him until a well directed bullet tore off nearly all of one of his ears and grazed his skull, momentarily stunning him, when some of the Sepoys dragged him down behind the rocks.

Almost instantly, however, Croley regained his senses, tore himself away from the Sepoys, and sprang up, gun in hand.

But Tom and Phil had just passed around a bend of the stream, and could no longer be seen.

Yielding to a wild paroxysm of rage, Croley dashed himself upon the ground foaming at the mouth, and uttering such furious imprecations that the Sepoys recoiled in dismay, and whispered among themselves that he was possessed by evil spirits.

In the meantime, Tom and Phil, who had escaped in an almost miraculous manner from the many bullets aimed at them, were making the best of their way down the stream.

Nor did they relax their efforts, except to rest a little two or three times under shelter of the bank, until they were more than a mile and a half from the water-fall.

The appearance of the stream where they now found themselves was very different from what it was at the place they entered it.

Its width was increased, the banks, instead of being firm, were muddy and slippery, the water had lost transparency, and the current became sluggish, as if affected by back-water.

In the middle of the stream, out of which it arose in a slanting position, was a medium-sized tree, which had probably been brought down by a freshet, until its roots caught in the muddy bottom, and anchored it firm and fast.

The gently inclined trunk looked like an inviting resting-place to the two boys, who were now pretty tired, and they climbed up on it, and seated themselves very comfortably some five feet above the water.

Neither Tom nor Phil had anything whatever but the clothes they wore, not even a pocket-knife. They were in the heart of a country swarming with blood-thirsty and merciless foes, and knew not which way to turn for succor.

Yet they were in fine spirits, the excitement caused by their narrow escape still affected them and they were at liberty—out of the clutches of Croley, which was enough to remove foundations of care from their bosoms.

A reaction might, and no doubt would, sooner or later, throw a damper over their feelings, but now, as they sat on the tree, discussing plans for the future, they were not only hopeful, but actually jubilant.

"Did yer iver see the bate av that?" exclaimed Phil, suddenly breaking off from the subject they were talking about.

"What?" asked Tom.

"D'ye moind that log now? Be jabbers, it's floatin' straight up strame."

Tom looked at the object indicated, and saw that it was an immense crocodile, at least thirty feet long.

The scaly monster had its cold, cruel eyes fixed on the boys, and moved toward them in death-like silence.

On it came without producing a ripple, until within ten feet of the boys, when it made a lightning-like rush, raised its head out of the water and snapped at their legs, which, however, they drew up on the tree in time to save themselves.

The crocodile then, after swimming around as if examining the position, deliberately tried to crawl up the inclined surface of the tree.

Tom and Phil moved up as far as they could towards the top of the tree, which bent and swayed and trembled like an aspen leaf beneath the immense weight of the crocodile.

The savage monster succeeded in getting about half its body up on the tree, but the

trunk was so narrow that when he endeavored to advance further he slipped off and fell into the water with a tremendous splash.

The tree, which had been very much distressed by the creature's weight, sprang up with such a sudden jerk that the two boys narrowly escaped being thrown off.

The crocodile made no further attempt to get at the boys, but swam slowly to and fro under the tree, as if determined to wait until they fell into his jaws.

"Begorra, it's a nice kettle of fish we're in," said Phil, ruefully.

"We might be in a worse," replied Tom, though he was not far from feeling what he said.

"It's meself that would like to see it, thin."

The words were scarcely out of Phil's mouth before his wish was gratified.

There was a rustling in the bushes, and a truculent-looking native, gun in hand, made his appearance on the bank and ordered the boys to come ashore.

"Shoot ther craythur, an' we'll," replied Phil, in his choicest Hindostanee, pointing at the crocodile.

Then he whispered to Tom:

"If he kills it we can swim ter ther other side whin his gun is empty."

This was an excellent plan, with one slight exception—it would not work.

The native was a Hindoo, and regarded the crocodile as a sacred creature; rather than harm it he would have killed his own grandfather.

Therefore, on hearing Phil's request, a horrible scowl came on the man's face and leveling the gun at the boy he sternly and peremptorily ordered them to come ashore immediately or he would fire.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOM AND PHIL ARE CAPTURED AND HUNG.

JUST under Tom and Phil was the huge crocodile, ready to seize them the instant they touched the water.

The Hindoo, though well aware that one or both of the boys would be caught and destroyed by the savage monster if they attempted to obey his order, threatened to fire if they did not at once start to come ashore.

Tom tried to expostulate with the man, but he would not listen to reason.

Death stared the two boys in the face, and there seemed to be no way in which it could be avoided.

Notwithstanding his perilous position, Phil's quick, Irish temper got the better of his judgment, and he addressed the native in the choicest Hindoo gallee (abuse) he could command.

Phil's limited stock of Hindoo words were soon exhausted, but that did not stop him; he fell back on his mother's tongue, and continued:

"Ouch, ye born omadhawn, may the curse of Crom'll rest on ye an' the devil fly away with ye; d'ye think we'd be after jumpin' inter the crocodile's mouth, ter plaze such a black, murtherin', barbarian as yerself!"

To the great astonishment of the two boys, as soon as Phil commenced speaking English the native lowered his gun.

And when Phil stopped talking the man asked in Hindoostanee:

"Who are you?"

Tom did not know any Hindoo word for American, so he answered:

"We are Goraloy." (Europeans).

The man shook his head and said:

"No, you are Sepoys."

Tom assured him that he was mistaken, and both the boys rolled up their sleeves and showed that their arms, where they were not sunburnt, were white.

This seemed to surprise the man very much. He hesitated a few moments, as if uncertain what to do, then drew a pistol from his belt and fired it in the air.

The report was answered by a shout, and in a few minutes a havildar and two armed natives made their appearance.

After exchanging a few words with the man who first discovered Tom and Phil, the havildar, who was a Mussulman, and had not reverence for the crocodile, threw some sticks at it, and the scaly monster reluctantly swam away down the stream and disappeared.

Tom and Phil were then ordered to swim ashore, and did so, though every moment they were in the water they feared a crocodile would seize them.

But they reached the shore in safety, and on

landing, were at once marched off through the woods at the point of the bayonet.

After proceeding some two miles, they arrived at a place where about three hundred British soldiers and a hundred and fifty Sikhs were bivouacing.

It was a portion of the column commanded by Major Renaud, which marched some miles in advance of the army, when General Havelock started from Allahabad towards Cawnpore.

The policy of the British was to strike, and strike hard, whenever there was a chance, and Renaud's path—or retribution, as it is called—was marked out so plainly, by bodies of rebels hanging from the trees along the roadside, that Havelock's men needed nothing else to guide them, while marching to join the column in advance.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil, when he saw the white troops; "it's safe we are now."

"I hope so," replied Tom, who, however, thought that the soldiers looked at them in a way that was far from friendly.

But there was not much time to speculate about the hostile demeanor of the men, for the two boys were at once conducted where Major Renaud and some of his officers were lounging on blankets under the wide-spreading limbs of a banyan tree.

Major Renaud's brow darkened when he saw Tom and Phil, and he said to the havildar:

"What do you mean by bringing these fellows here? Why did you not shoot or hang them at once?"

The havildar told how the two boys were captured, and in conclusion said:

"They are Europeans, and I did not know whether your orders not to take any prisoners applied to them or not."

"Ah, Europeans!" exclaimed the major. "I thought, from the color of their faces and their dress, that they were Sepoys."

Then, turning to Tom and Phil, he asked:

"Who are you, and how came you here in that uniform?"

Tom told, in as few words as possible, who Phil and himself were, and how they came to be where they were, dressed in the uniform of Sepoys.

When Tom concluded, he was astounded at seeing that there was a scowl or sneering expression on the faces of everybody around him and Phil.

It was very evident that no one believed a word he had uttered.

"This is not the first time I have had to deal with white renegades," said Major Renaud, fiercely. "But what have we here?"

The latter exclamation was caused by a Sikh, who came dashing into camp, his horse covered with foam.

The Sikh was one of a reconnoitering party which had been sent out by Major Renaud, and it was this force that attacked Croley and the Sepoys.

As soon as the Sikh dismounted, he gave an account of the fight, and said that the Sepoys were commanded by a white man, and had others with him; he also stated that they had cut their way out of the position in which they were surrounded, and retreated towards Cawnpore, in a badly demoralized condition.

A company of mounted men to assist in pursuing the Sepoys, and a surgeon with some litters for the wounded Sikhs, were at once sent forward under the guidance of the man who brought intelligence of the fight.

As soon as this was done, Major Renaud said to the group of officers:

"Gentlemen, you have heard this very remarkable account that the young man gave of himself and his companions; what do you think of it?"

"That it is a lie from beginning to end," replied a red-faced captain.

"One of them is an American, and the other Irish," said the lieutenant, "and of course they hate the British."

"And would be glad to see us all killed, or driven out of the country," growled another officer.

"But being willing to fill their own pockets, took service with the Sepoys, thinking they would have a fine time plundering."

These, and similar remarks, were heard on all sides.

"You have expressed my opinion exactly," said Major Renaud to the officers, "so was" are all of the same mind, I suppose they had as well be strung up without the formality of a drum-head court-martial."

"Certainly."

"By all means."

"Hang them at once."

"Let them swing."

Exclaimed different officers, and the red-faced captain roared out:

"Hanging is too good for them; they ought to be burnt!"

Tom and Phil were dumfounded at the turn things had taken.

They had naturally supposed that the British would commiserate their condition and gladly contribute to their comfort and safety.

But on the contrary they found they were regarded as persons who had leagued themselves with those fiends in human forms, the Sepoys, to murder and plunder, were execrated by every one, and on the point of being put to death in the most ignominious manner.

"We can prove our innocence," said Tom, as soon as he in some degree recovered his presence of mind.

"How?" asked Major Renaud.

"By Colonel Kelly, or his peon, Hamet."

"Where are they?"

"I told you how they parted from us."

"Supposing, for the sake of argument, that you told the truth—which I very much doubt—it is more than probable that they are both dead."

"I think not."

"Well, they cannot be found, so there is no use to speak of them."

"We can give the names of a number of persons in the United States who will tell who and what we are, if you will write to them."

"Pooh! they can't possibly know what you have been doing lately."

"They will vouch for our good character."

"That would not affect my judgment in this matter, and it would require months to make the inquiry. Is there any one in India to whom you can refer?"

"Captain Helm, if he is alive."

"Which is not likely."

"Miss Flora Kelly."

"But you say that she is in captivity."

"I do not know of any one else except Colonel Kelly, and Hamet, his peon."

"They may not be found in months, if ever, and I can't encumber myself with prisoners."

"Sure it's no trouble we'd be at all," said Phil, "because we'd do our duty as sojers."

"I could not trust you," replied Major Renaud; then turning to the red-faced captain, he said: "Captain Nims, will you attend to their execution?"

"Certainly," replied the captain, eagerly. "I have my eye on a nice limb which stretches over the road; I'll have them strung up there as a warning to others."

Tom and Phil experienced a sinking of the heart, which they had never felt to such an extent before, even when death seemed certain.

Nor was it to be wondered at.

Anticipating friendly treatment, they found distrust and hatred.

Expecting safety, they were confronted by destruction.

Phil asked for a priest, but there was none with the command.

The two boys clasped hands and bade each other a last farewell.

After which they prayed silently.

Preparations for the execution were at once made.

Tom and Phil were led to a spot designated by Captain Nims and their arms pinioned.

The noose of two strong halters were put around their necks and drawn tight.

The other ends of the ropes were then thrown over an overhanging limb and seized by a number of soldiers, who stood ready to run the two boys up side by side when the order was given.

The fiery-faced Nims chuckled to himself, took a piece of wide board and with some charcoal marked on it the following words:

TOM TOPP, (American.)

AND

PHIL FITZGERALD, (Irish.)

Hung like dogs for serving with the Sepoys.

This placard was then attached with cords to the necks of the two boys, so that it was supported in a horizontal position between them.

"Now," said Nims, rubbing his hands with ferocious glee, "pull them up gently, so that they may be a long time dying."

The next instant Tom and Phil were hoist-

ed up into the air, and hung with quivering limbs, protruding tongues, and blackening faces slowly strangling to death.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RESCUE OF COLONEL KELLY AND CAPTAIN HELM—WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS.

It will be remembered that Colonel Kelly and Captain Helm being pursued by two tigers, abandoned the low sand island upon which they had taken refuge, and struck out towards the open sea.

Also, that Captain Helm severely wounded one of the tigers, which then swam back to the island.

And that Colonel Kelly's horse, frantic with fright, plunged so as to throw him, and made for the shore, pursued by the other tiger, while Colonel Kelly—whose arms were both disabled—was kept afloat by Captain Helm.

It was with extreme difficulty that Captain Helm supported Colonel Kelly, and they drifted at the mercy of the tide, which was rising, and bore them straight towards the small island, upon which could be dimly seen the dark form of the wounded tiger.

"We will soon be face to face with the tiger," said Captain Helm, "but the tide is so strong that I cannot alter our course."

"Leave me to my fate and look out for your own safety," replied Colonel Kelly.

"I would rather die than do such a dastardly thing, and hope you will not pain me by suggesting it again."

Conscious that Captain Helm was acting as he himself would do, if their situations were reversed, Colonel Kelly ceased to insist on being abandoned.

Steadily the tide drifted them towards the island, and they were soon near enough to see that the tiger was in a crouching attitude, with its belly on the sand, and head lowered, as if ready to spring on them as soon as they were near enough.

The feelings of the two men can scarcely be imagined, much less described.

Captain Helm could not even draw his pistol, for he had to use both of his hands constantly to keep himself and helpless companion afloat.

And thus they drifted nearer and nearer to the terrible man-eater, every moment expecting him to utter his appalling roar, spring on them like a triumphant fiend, crush their skulls with his tremendous paws, and tear them to pieces with his powerful teeth.

When within about ten feet of the grisly monster they touched bottom, and found that by standing erect they could keep their heads above water.

"This is lucky," whispered Captain Helm, hastily drawing his pistol. "I can now fire a shot in our defense, if the cartridges are not ruined."

"Never fear," replied Colonel Kelly in the same tone, "they are water-proof."

"Had I not better shoot him at once?"

"By no means; he must be severely wounded, or we would have been attacked before now; let him keep quiet if he will."

But Colonel Kelly and Captain Helm soon found that they could not remain stationary.

The tide continued to rise, and they had to take step after step towards the island, until they were not more than six feet from the tiger, which, however, continued to lie still as a rock.

"By George!" said Captain Helm, who was in advance with his pistol presented ready to fire, "I believe he is dead."

"That is what I think," replied Colonel Kelly; "give him a shot, and see; we will have to get on the island in a few minutes, anyway, or the water will be over our heads."

Captain Helm fired at the tiger's head, but it never stirred; the creature was as dead as a herring.

In another moment the colonel and captain were upon the small island, congratulating each other upon their fortunate escape.

Colonel Kelly was so weak and faint from the loss of blood, that Captain Helm made him lie down and go to sleep, while he kept watch.

During the night, to keep himself awake, Captain Helm skinned the tiger, intending, if possible, to preserve the skin as a memento of the adventure.

In the morning, soon after sunrise, a coasting vessel passing was hailed, took them on board, and carried them to Calcutta.

Colonel Kelly was at once surrounded by hosts of friends, who treated Captain Helm

with the greatest consideration and kindness when they heard of his heroic conduct.

But the news they heard at Calcutta greatly distressed Captain Helm, and made Colonel Kelly almost frantic.

The troops that were sent to relieve Colonel Kelly, and remove the treasure from his station, had been attacked by an overwhelming force and cut to pieces.

Therefore, there were strong reasons for fearing that Flora, Tom, Phil and Hamet had been murdered, as the Sepoys scarcely ever spared the lives of prisoners.

The condition of affairs too was most alarming. Regiment after regiment of native troops had thrown off its allegiance to the British crown, and amidst dreadful atrocities, put their officers and all other Europeans in their power to death.

At Lucknow, Delhi, Ferzapore, Bareilly, Meerut, Allghur, Shahjehanpore, Nurseerabad and various other places the mutineers were triumphant, and the bravest of the British began to fear that they must abandon the country or be exterminated.

The arrival of Colonel Kelly at Calcutta was regarded as a most fortunate occurrence.

For his well-known military genius and experience, his knowledge of the country and people, and his high standing with both Europeans and natives, made him of the highest value in the emergency.

Sir Colin Campbell, the commander-in-chief, and many others high in office, urged him to accept a position in the army, and take the field as soon as possible.

To this Colonel Kelly consented upon condition that he might raise a force of Sikhs and irregular cavalry, and operate upon the army, or independently as he saw proper.

These points he insisted upon, so that he might be at liberty to search for, and if possible, rescue Flora, Tom, Phil and Hamet, or revenge them if they were dead.

His wishes were promptly complied with; he was at once commissioned as a colonel in the army, and received the orders he desired.

Neither of his arms were broken, but the flesh wounds were severe.

But so eager was he to get to the front, that in less than a week after receiving his papers, Colonel Kelly, disregarding the advice of surgeons, started up the country in a hackerie, or covered carriage, drawn by bullocks, accompanied by Captain Helm, and escorted by fifty mounted Sikhs.

Five days afterwards Hamet, with Thunderbolt, Banshee and his own horse, was accidentally met on the road.

Being informed by Hamet of the capture of Flora and the two boys, and the probable destination of their captors, Colonel Kelly hurried forward, recruiting as he went.

At the expiration of three weeks, during which a hundred Sikhs were enlisted, and added to his original escort, he overtook General Havelock's army, encamped on the road to Cawnpore.

Learning that Major Renaud was in advance, the colonel proceeded to join him, hoping with his assistance to intercept the captors of Flora and the boys.

He arrived at Major Renaud's bivouac with Captain Helm and his company of Sikhs a few seconds after Tom and Phil were hung, and halted close to the tree up on which they were dangling.

"There are two men who have been hung," said Captain Helm, looking out of the carriage.

"Sepoys, I see," replied the colonel, unconsciously gazing at the suspended figures; "but what is written on that placard? Can you make out?"

"Great God!" exclaimed the captain; "it is Tom and Phil! For mercy's sake have them cut down; they may yet be alive."

The next instant the colonel and captain leaped out of the carriage.

"Lower those boys instantly!" yelled the colonel to the men who were yet holding the ends of the halters with which Tom and Phil were drawn up.

The colonel had no insignia of rank about him, and the soldiers, not knowing him, hesitated to obey, while the red-faced Nims came forward in an arrogant and blustering manner, saying:

"I am managing this execution. Who are you that dares to interfere?"

"I am Colonel Arthur Kelly, and darn you, if those boys are not let down immediately, I'll kill you with my own hand."

Nims was a coward as well as a bully, and

he slunk away, muttering something about seeing Major Renaud.

The soldiers delayed no longer, but lowered Tom and Phil to the ground, where they lay like logs.

The halters were at once removed from their necks, but they were apparently lifeless.

A surgeon, who with some others had been attracted to the spot, knelt by the side of Tom and Phil, felt their wrists, placed his hand over their hearts, then arose and shook his head.

"Doctor, is there any hope?" simultaneously asked Colonel Kelly and Captain Helm.

"None. They are dead."

"Dead!" echoed Colonel Kelly. "Then, by Heaven, I will call their murderers to a strict account."

"They were not murdered, colonel," replied the surgeon, in respectful tones, "but executed by order of Major Renaud."

"For what cause?"

"Because they were in the service of the Sepoys."

"It is a lie! a base, infamous lie!" said Captain Helm; "truer-hearted or braver boys never lived—they were incapable of doing anything dishonorable."

"And so say I," exclaimed Colonel Kelly.

"If we had arrived here a few minutes sooner we might have saved them."

"I did not witness the execution," said the surgeon, "but I know when it took place, and from the suddenness of their deaths, think that their necks were broken."

"No," replied an officer, "I saw the whole thing; they were pulled slowly, and must have choked to death."

"Ha! say you so?" ejaculated Captain Helm, "then there may yet be a chance to save them. I have seen persons resuscitated after apparent death from drowning."

"I will try to revive them," said the surgeon, "but to be frank with you, I do not think it possible to do so."

Whereupon he went to work with several soldiers as assistants, alternately forcing air into the lungs of the boys, and expelling it by pressing on their chests, thus imitating natural breathing.

A few minutes after this operation was commenced, Major Renaud made his appearance, greeted Colonel Kelly, with whom he was well acquainted, and was introduced to Captain Helm.

On learning that Tom had given a true account of himself and Phil, the major expressed much regret for his precipitancy in ordering their execution, and encouraged the surgeon and his assistants to persevere in their efforts.

To do the soldiers justice, however, they needed no urging to do whatever they could; they were as eager to save the lives of Tom and Phil as they had been to put them to death.

But for a long time it seemed as if the attempt to resuscitate the boys would be in vain.

However, after the artificial respiration had been continued for nearly an hour, Phil began to breathe naturally, and a few minutes afterwards Tom showed signs of life.

Their condition improved rapidly, and at the expiration of thirty minutes they had so far regained their consciousness that both recognized Colonel Kelly and Captain Helm; the joy of all four can readily be imagined.

When he saw the look of recognition in the eyes of Tom and Phil, the surgeon forbade them to speak, as their lives yet trembled as it were in a balance, and the slightest exertion might prove fatal.

Restoratives were administered to the two boys, a tent was hastily erected for their accommodation, and just as the sun went down and darkness came on they were put to bed, and almost immediately fell into a deep sleep—so death-like, that Captain Helm, who watched by their side, feared that they would not live to see the light of another day.

After a short time the captain was joined by Colonel Kelly, who was almost heart-broken.

He had just learned from Major Renaud the fact—communicated by Tom—that Flora was now in all probabilities an inmate of Nina Sahib's zenana, and subject to his brutal caprices.

Captain Helm uttered no words of consolation. At such a time they would have been the bitterest mockery. But as the night waned and the camp-fires burnt low, flickered

and died out, quenched by the heavy dew, he talked of revenge.

And the heart of Colonel Kelly, which had been melted by sorrow, grew hard as the nether mill-stone, and he thirsted for blood like a tigress when robbed of her cubs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE ARMY—CAWNPORE—THE DEVIL'S ISLAND.

Tom and Phil slept through the night almost without stirring, and awakened in the morning feeling rather weak and their necks were very tender and sore, otherwise they experienced no ill effects from their terrible experience of the day before.

As soon as Tom and Phil got out of bed, they—at the request of Colonel Kelly and Captain Helm—gave a full account of what happened to them and Flora.

Colonel Kelly and Captain Helm then related their adventure, and the former announced his intention of forthwith starting to aid in the pursuit of Croley and the Sepoys with him.

But this intention was abandoned in consequence of the return of the men who had been engaged in the pursuit.

They reported that they had encountered a strong body of cavalry, which handled them very roughly.

They also brought intelligence that Cawnpore had fallen, freeing the rebel troops from occupation, and they were pushing forward a strong force to oppose the British advance.

Major Renaud sent the news by courier to General Havelock, and determined to remain where he was until he received instructions how to act in the emergency.

This was a fortunate thing for Tom and Phil, as they were sorely in need of a few days' rest.

Colonel Kelly intended to raise a regiment, and had, as before stated, already enlisted a company of Sikhs one hundred and fifty strong.

After ascertaining that it would be agreeable to them, the colonel appointed Tom captain and Phil first lieutenant of this company.

Hamet, who, previous to his entering the personal service of Colonel Kelly, had served in the army and was a well-trained soldier, was assigned to duty as Tom's sabadar.

The Hindoos are the best grooms in the world, and Hamet had kept Thunderbolt and Banshee in splendid order. So Tom and Phil could not have been better mounted than they were.

And Colonel Kelly sent to Allahabad and procured them complete outfits, including uniforms, swords and pistols.

When the things arrived and Tom and Phil had thrown aside their tattered clothing, and put on the showy uniforms, two more handsome and dashing-looking officers it would have been hard to find.

After a short delay, Major Renaud, having received orders to that effect, broke up his camp, and advanced cautiously towards the enemy.

Two nights afterwards, General Havelock, with the main army—after a forced march—joined Major Renaud on the road by moonlight, and with him marched to Futtelpore, where the enemy were found in force, strongly posted.

Thinking that they had only Major Renaud's small force to contend with, the Sepoys attacked at once.

But in less than thirty minutes afterwards they scattered and fled in utter confusion, leaving eleven of their guns on the field.

While the infantry were fully engaged in front, the enemy's cavalry made a bold attack upon the supply train of the British, the destruction of which would have been as disastrous as a crushing defeat.

Captain Nims, with a force of irregular cavalry, who were guarding the train, fled in the most cowardly manner.

But Tom, seeing the danger the supplies were exposed to, charged the enemy—who outnumbered his company two to one—impetuously, and drove them off with heavy loss.

After the battle was over, General Havelock publicly thanked Tom, and ordered Nims to be stripped of his uniform and drummed out of the army.

During the next five days General Havelock's army won three battles, in all of which Tom and Phil behaved with conspicuous

gallantry, and re-entered in triumph the blood-stained walls of Cawnpore.

But they were disappointed in their expectations of rescuing their friends.

There were a thousand Europeans in the place when the siege commenced, half of whom were women and children. Five men escaped by swimming down the Ganges; all the rest were killed during the siege, or murdered after the surrender.

In the house where the women and children were butchered, the blood on the floor was over shoe deep, and an immense well into which the dead had been thrown for burial, and the wounded to die, was found filled with its ghastly contents to the brim.

Mutilation and decomposition rendered it impossible to recognize any of the dead, and as Colonel Kelly and Tom gazed into the horrid sepulcher, they grew sick at heart with the thought that it might contain the body of Flora.

But all efforts to learn the fate of Flora failed.

It was ascertained, however, that Croley and Bajee Rao had been at Cawnpore, and after conferring with Nina Sahib, were sent off with a strong body of cavalry and a number of covered wagons.

After a halt of two weeks, General Have-lock started to the relief of Lucknow; but Tom and Phil did not march with him; they remained at Cawnpore with Colonel Kelly, who paid the penalty of travel before his wounds were healed by being prostrated on a bed of sickness for two months.

During the colonel's illness the two boys were worked half to death; they took turns with Captain Helmin nursing their sick friend, and while one of them was thus engaged, the other was in command of the Sikhs, scouting and skirmishing with the Sepoys, who began to gather round Cawnpore as soon as the main army left.

Before Colonel Kelly had fully recovered, Lucknow was relieved, Delhi captured and Nina Sahib a fugitive, with a price set on his head.

But Tom had not succeeded in getting the slightest clew to the whereabouts of either Flora or Croley.

The British arms were everywhere triumphant, but the country was in a terrible condition, being overrun by the scattered Sepoys, who plundered and murdered right and left.

Against an unusually large, crafty and blood-thirsty band of these marauders Tom was sent with his company of Sikhs, and was soon on their track.

But the robbers were not to be easily trapped. Vestiges of them were found 'tis true—smouldering ruins, late a peaceful village—here and there a murdered family—flocks wantonly butchered and left weltering in their blood, and other horrors showed where they had been, but they were nowhere to be seen.

Tom, however, having heard that the chief of the robbers was a one-eyed man was fired by the hope that he was Croley, and prosecuted the search with almost supernatural activity.

He paid spies highly for information, encouraged injured villagers to seek revenge, and spared neither himself nor his men to leave no stone unturned to capture the robber chief and his band.

At length, acting upon information received from a native, Tom made a forced march, and for the first time caught sight of the robbers, who were just leaving a village that they had plundered and set on fire.

The robbers at once abandoned their spoils and fled, hotly pursued by Tom and his Sikhs. The robbers, however, were quickly out of sight, for their horses were fresh, while those of the Sikhs were jaded.

But Tom was not thus to be baffled. There were in his company men who could follow a trail over the burning sands of Kandeish with unerring certainty, and he hung on the traces of the fugitives like a blood-hound.

With many windings and turnings the trail led to the Ganges River, and disappeared at the water's edge.

The banks on both sides of the river for many miles up and down were carefully examined, but the trail could not be again discovered.

The robbers had disappeared as mysteriously as if the earth had swallowed them up.

In the Ganges a short distance below where the trail was lost, there was an island upon which it was supposed no one could land;

the natives had a superstitious dread of the place, believing it to be tenanted by evil spirits.

After trying every other way that he could think of to find out which way the robbers had gone, Tom determined to give the island a careful examination.

This resolution was combatted by his whole company, from Hamet down.

"We will go if you order us to do so," they said to Tom, "but no good will come of it; the island is a haunt of Pishash (the devil,) and he destroys all who attempt to land on it."

Tom knew that it would be useless to reason with the Sikhs on such a subject, and he did not wish to force them to do what they were so averse to, without there was a strong probability of accomplishing something; therefore, he said:

"Let the company be deployed along the river bank to protect us with their rifles, and Lieutenant Fitzgerald and myself will take a nearer look at the island; perhaps there will be no occasion for any one else to go to it."

Then getting into a small boat, Tom and Phil rowed out to the island and pulled around it.

The island was one huge mass of rock, towering to a height of at least three hundred feet, and on every side overhung or arose steep as the upright walls of a house from the water, and nowhere could be seen either fissure or projection that would have afforded foot-hold even to a squirrel.

Though not a twig or blade of grass grew on the sides of the island, its top was clothed with the most luxuriant trees which shot high into the air, while all along the edge of the cliff was a dense and apparently impenetrable mass of matted vines and bushes.

On failing to discover any place where a landing could be made on the island, Tom was worse puzzled than ever to imagine what had become of the robbers.

Determining to fathom the mystery, if possible, he, on returning to shore, ordered his company to camp a short distance from the river, posted men in the forest along the bank to keep a sharp lookout, and sent off a party with orders to procure enough boats to carry the whole command, and to bring them down after dark, and conceal them in a creek near at hand.

Nothing unusual occurred until the next night about twelve o'clock, when Tom and Phil, who were visiting the lookouts to see that they were on the alert, heard a slight noise near the water's edge.

As they listened there came through the stillness the murmur of gruff voices, and then a sound—too significantly piteous to be mistaken—the moan of some one in extremity of terror or pain.

They had only advanced a few steps when a lithe, slender figure darted, or rather, flew by them, shrieking in heartrending tones for "Help—help! For God's sake help!"

Close upon the heels of the fugitives came two men in Sepoy uniforms, who, finding themselves likely to be distanced, fired their muskets at the flying person who thereupon fell heavily to the ground.

Drawing their swords, Tom and Phil sprang upon the Sepoys and cut them down before they were even aware of their danger.

Tom and Phil then turned their attention to the fugitive, who was found lying on the ground somewhat stunned by the fall but unhurt by the bullets.

On raising the prostrate figure to an erect position, the boys saw before them an effeminate looking Hindoo, some thirty odd years of age, who was trembling excessively.

Being assured of safety he became calmer, and asked Tom:

"Are you not the sahib that has left his home to catch those who have done much bad work?"

"I am in search of the robbers," replied Tom. "Where did you come from, and what were those men going to do with you?"

"I have been among the robbers, and by order of their chief was about to be put to death."

"If you can show me where they are, you shall be both rewarded and avenged."

"The word of a sahib is equal to an oath on the Koran. Those he seeks are on the island near at hand."

"Impossible!"

"Be jabbers, it's a lie!" exclaimed Phil.

"No, sahib," the Hindoo answered meekly. "Why should I lie? If you will hear my words, I will show you the whole matter."

He then explained that there was a concealed opening in the side of the island, through which its top could be easily reached, and said that the robbers were celebrating the great Mohammedan festival of the Mohurran, and were stupefied with liquor and could easily be overpowered.

"But what security have I," asked Tom, "that you will not lead us into a trap?"

"The life of your slave is in your power, and you can take it if you find yourself deceived."

Tom hesitated no longer, but collecting his men, embarked in the boats and pulled softly towards the island.

On reaching it, the Hindoo pointed out a large stone door, which was now standing open; its bottom was below the surface of the water, and it was cunningly contrived that when closed, no one not in the secret would ever have supposed it was not a portion of the solid rock.

Pushing their boats through the singular doorway, Tom and his men found themselves in a cavern, whose floor was water, and the interior of which was shrouded in more than midnight darkness.

The water was only six or eight feet deep, and by direction of the Hindoo, who was in the leading boat with Tom, the men did not row, but pushed the boats along by pressing their oars against the bottom.

Not a whisper was uttered as they proceeded, and the silence was so profound that it was almost painful.

Suddenly, Tom felt a jar, as if something had struck against the bottom of his boat—the door of the cavern shut with a thundering clap, that resounded through the place with hollow echoes, and a deep, sullen-toned bell began to toll, startling the Heavens as if every stroke fell on their hearts.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE STRONGHOLD—FLORA AND CROLEY—FIGHTING WITH FIENDS—LOST, ALL LOST.

"WHA—WHA!" exclaimed the Sikhs, in suppressed tones, grasping their arms when the door of the cavern closed, and they heard the loud booming of the bell.

They thought they were in a trap, but were too brave and well-drilled to make a loud outcry.

The instant the door of the cavern slammed to, Tom grasped the arm of the Hindoo guide, clapped the muzzle of a pistol to his head, and said:

"What does this mean? Speak quick or I'll fire! If we are betrayed you die!"

The Hindoo was startled by the suddenness of the action, and by feeling the cold muzzle of the pistol pressed against his head, but he replied, steadily enough:

"No, sahib, I have not deceived you; your boat struck against something in the water that is fixed to loosen a catch which holds the door open; then the door closed by itself and made the bell ring; the same thing always happens when a boat passes along where we are."

"But won't it put the robbers on the alert?" asked Tom.

"No; if they notice it at all, they will think the noise was caused by the boat of the men who were sent to murder me."

Tom remembered feeling a jar as if his boat had come in contact with something, and was satisfied.

He explained the matter to his men, and they again commenced to push the boats along.

After proceeding in profound silence for perhaps a hundred yards, the glitter of stars were seen through a circular opening overhead.

"Let the boats float," said the Hindoo.

The men stopped pushing with the oars, and the boats gliding onward with the impetus which had been imparted to them, grounded on the sloping edge of a rocky platform.

The whole party now landed and drew the boats up on the platform far enough to keep them from drifting away.

Then following Tom, who kept hold of the guide's arm with one hand, and carried a revolver in the other, the company moved across the platform and commenced to ascend a flight of steps cut in the solid rock, and

which wound spirally up the sides of a shaft or wall some ten feet in diameter.

After a steep and winding ascent of between three and four hundred steps, they emerged into the upper air, and found themselves in an open space about a hundred yards square, partially overgrown with shrubbery, and three sides of which were low but massive buildings.

A huge iron grating, used to close the subterranean stair by which they ascended, was lying to one side of the opening, with dry wood piled on it, ready for ignition, showing that in time of danger a fire was kept burning on the grating, thus presenting an impassable barrier to any one ascending from the cavern.

Tom and his men were all fatigued by climbing the steep and narrow stairs, and soon as they emerged into the open air, threw themselves flat on the ground to rest and determine on a plan of action.

The glimmer of lights could be seen in two of the buildings, and from one of them proceeded the sounds of revelry, but the other was buried in silence.

"The band of robbers are there," whispered the Hindoo guide, pointing to the building where the revel was going on, "and their chief is in the other house that has a light in it."

"Do you think he has any men with him?" asked Tom, in the same tone.

"Only one who sleeps in the building; but a sentinel is always placed at the front door."

Tom quickly made up his mind what to do, and as soon as he had explained his intention to Phil the men proceeded to act.

The first thing done was to close the opening to the subterranean stairway by placing the iron grating over it and to post six men in the bushes a few yards distant to shoot any robbers who might attempt to escape that way.

Then Tom, with the rest of the men, crept noiselessly forward and surrounded the house where the robbers were carousing.

Leaving Phil with the company, silent as fate and as terrible, crouching among the shrubbery, Tom, with the Hindoo guide and four of the Sikhs, stole toward the quarters of the robber chief.

On approaching the house the sentinel was found lying in front of the door in a drunken slumber.

"Secure that man," said Tom.

Two of the Sikhs approached the sleeper softly, and bent over him; one pressed the end of a sash on his mouth, and at the same instant the other Sikh stabbed him to the heart; he struggled convulsively for a moment or two, and then lay still.

Tom did not intend to have the man killed, but it was done so quickly that he could not interfere.

Placing two of the Sikhs at the door, with instructions to cut down any man who attempted to escape, Tom, with the other two and the guide, entered the building.

Led by the guide, who seemed to be perfectly familiar with the place, they passed through several corridors with marble floors and finally reached an arched doorway, over which hung a thick cloth curtain.

Drawing a keen dagger which he carried concealed in his clothes, the Hindoo guide cut two small holes in the curtain, and motioning to Tom to follow his example, applied his eye to one of the openings.

Looking through the hole in the curtain, Tom got a view of the interior of a large room, luxuriously furnished in the oriental style.

But he had no eye for the gorgeous furniture and decorations, his whole attention was fixed on the two occupants of the room, who, to his intense astonishment, were Flora Kelly and Croley; they were both dressed in costly native costumes, but Tom recognized them at once.

Flora was seated, but Croley was standing, and they were evidently engaged in a conversation of an exciting and absorbing nature.

"I will be trifled with no longer," said Croley. "Before another sun sets you shall be my wife."

"Never," replied Flora. "I would die first, even if you did not have a wife already."

The words were scarcely uttered when the Hindoo tore aside the curtain, bounded to Croley's side, and struck at his breast with a dagger.

Warned by the rustling of the curtain, Croley turned just in time to save his life.

Throwing up his left arm, he caught the point of the dagger in his loose sleeve, and plucking a long, keen poniard from his belt, struck home.

A stream of blood spurted over his hand. The immense form of the Hindoo bent like a broken reed, and fell back lifeless.

As the Hindoo fell, Tom drew his sword and leaped into the room.

Uttering an inarticulate cry of rage, more bestial than human, Croley dashed forward, and struck at him with the bloody poniard.

With a dexterous moulinet, Tom parried the blow, and his sword shivered the highly-tempered weapon of Croley like glass.

But before Tom could recover his guard, Croley closed with him, and clutched his throat with the grasp of a giant.

The onset was so sudden and furious, that Tom, choking and struggling, was forced down on one knee and dropped his sword.

The grip on his throat was so powerful that his brain whirled and his senses reeled.

He groped blindly at his belt for his revolver, but, before he could draw it, one of the Sikhs dealt Croley a terrific blow on the head with the butt of a pistol, and he dropped in his tracks like an ox felled in the shambles.

Tom arose to his feet breathless but unhurt, and Flora Kelly, who had instinctively sprang forward to aid him, fell fainting in his arms.

At that instant the report of a gun rang sharp and clear upon the midnight air.

Hastily placing the insensible girl on a couch, and ordering the two Sikhs to remain with her, and to guard Croley carefully, Tom snatched up his sword and rushed out to join his company.

One of Tom's men had accidentally discharged his gun, and the robbers knowing that something was wrong—after a few moments' hesitation—caught up their weapons, and prepared to sally forth.

But before they did so Tom was by Phil's side.

Little dreaming of the unseen death that lurked in the shadows of the myrtle and orange trees, the robbers came streaming pell-mell towards the door, their features ablaze with drink and distorted with passion.

"Fire!" shouted Tom, when he saw the broad doorway crowded full of the villains.

A pitiless jet of flame spurted in the very faces of the robbers, then there was a crashing report, the sound of falling men on the floor, cries of rage, groans and shrieks of terror.

Appalled by the swift destruction that had overtaken so many of their numbers, the robbers recoiled and tried to close the door of the house, but could not do so quickly in consequence of the dead and dying piled upon the floor.

"Charge!" yelled Tom, and he and Phil, sword in hand, followed by the Sikhs, hurled themselves against the door before it could be fastened, burst it open, gained a footing in the hall and flung themselves on the foe.

The fight immediately became desperate, and soon the smoke and sulphurous flames of the gunpowder were stifling.

There was only one door to the hall, and the windows were mere slits in the thick walls, scarcely wide enough for a thin man to squeeze himself through.

The robbers, inflamed with drink, and unable to retreat, fought like penned wolves and died hard.

The melee was close and suffocating, and enveloped in the dense powder pall no man knew how the killing went on.

Men fell fast on both sides, but the survivors spurned the quivering corpses and wounded out of the way or trod them down and continued the deadly work.

At length, after two-thirds of their number were slain, the robbers were forced back until they were hurled against the rear wall of the building, and the conflict became almost a butchery.

No quarter was asked or given, but all was blood, and death and victory.

Most of the robbers were cut or shot down where they stood, and died fighting as long as they could pull a trigger, or strike a blow.

But towards the last, some few made a dash for the window, and attempted to escape; among them Phil recognized Bajee Rao, and with a well-directed shot cleared off old scores with that wily Hindoo, by ending his existence. Only five or six of the fugitives

got out of the building, and they were hunted down by the Sikhs and killed.

Never was there a fight more rapid or desperate. It did not occupy fifteen minutes—not ten, probably—though it is hard to say, for description moves so slowly, action so rapidly, yet when it was over, twenty-three Sikhs were dead or mortally wounded, a large number, more or less hurt, and the corpses of sixty-seven robbers stretched upon the floor.

Though they exposed themselves recklessly, and were constantly where the danger seemed the thickest, Tom, Phil and Hamet were among the fortunate few who escaped injury.

Tom did not know whether all of the robbers were engaged in the fight or not, and was apprehensive that there might be others, who would take advantage of the opportunity while the conflict was raging, to rescue Croley, and carry off, or kill Flora Kelly.

Therefore, as soon as the fight was over, Tom directed Phil to see that the wounded were cared for, and taking Hamet, and eight men with him, hurried back to the house where Flora and Croley were left.

The two Sikhs whom he had posted at the door, were no longer there, and Tom began to fear for the worst.

Almost breathless with anxiety, he hurried through the corridors, and entered the room where he left Flora and Croley.

They and their guard had all disappeared.

The body of the Hindoo guide lay on the floor where it fell, and the furniture was overturned and broken, showing that a violent struggle had taken place during Tom's absence.

Tom's heart stood still, and his strong spirit grew faint within him.

His very soul was filled with bitterness by the thought that at that moment he fancied his victory was complete, the object of his undying hatred had escaped—the girl he loved better than his life, was torn from him.

"Fool! fool that I was to leave them," he groaned, beating his breast. "Lost! lost! all lost!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT BECAME OF FLORA—WILLIAM ALSTON—TOM GETS HIS FATHER'S WATCH AGAIN—CONFESSION OF CROLEY.

THOUGH the disappearance of Flora and Croley was a stunning blow to Tom, he did not long despair.

Mastering his feelings by a powerful effort, he sent for Phil and all the Sikhs that were not attending to the wounded.

When they came a guard was posted around the building, and the rest was ordered to search the house from top to bottom.

Directed by Hamet, most of the men scattered themselves through the different parts of the building, while Tom and Phil, with some few others, commenced their investigations in the room where Flora and Croley were left.

The apartment apparently had but one door, and Tom almost instantly concluded that there must be a secret entrance.

The room was wainscoted with dark wood, and a close inspection with the eye, showed no break or other indication of a door.

Tom and Phil then began to pass their hands over the walls from as high up as they could reach down to the floor.

At length Tom touched a spot which felt colder and harder than the rest.

It was a piece of iron, shaped and colored like a knot in the wood.

He pressed it; there was a clicking noise, and a panel slid back, revealing the entrance to a dark and narrow passage.

Seizing one of the silver lamps which were burning in the room, Tom, followed by Phil and the men with them, passed through the opening, and after traveling the passage, came to a strong door plated with iron.

The door was locked, and the key was on the other side.

Tom heard a stir within, and placing his mouth to the keyhole, said:

"Open the door, or we will break it down."

"Who's there?" asked a voice that made Tom's heart bound in his bosom.

"It is me—Tom Topp," he answered.

The next instant the door was thrown open, and he saw before him Flora Kelly, Croley, and the two Sikhs that were left with them.

One of the Sikhs had his head tied up, and there were several bruises on the face of Cro-

ley, whose arms were secured to his side with a sword belt.

The room in which they were was not much larger than a cell, and entirely without ventilation, so as soon as they exchanged greetings, and Tom, at Flora's request, had relocked the door, and taken out the key, the whole party returned to the large chamber.

Then an account was given of what happened after Tom went away, which was as follows:

Flora soon regained her consciousness, and hearing the sounds of the fight which was going on, became very much alarmed.

The two Sikhs were eager to go and join their comrades, she urged them to remain where they were, and while their attention

you—here it is," and suiting the action to the word, she handed Tom his father's watch.

Tom thanked her, and turning to Croley, who stood guarded on each side by a Sikh, said:

"Your life is forfeited, but you may save yourself some torture by telling me how this watch came into your possession."

Croley frowned contemptuously, and remained obstinately silent.

Tom was about to make another remark, when a shout was heard—the sound of hurrying footsteps—and a man dressed in the native costume rushed into the room, closely pursued by Hamet, and throwing himself at Tom's feet, exclaimed:

"Save me! For God's sake, save me!"

"Death?" faltered Alston, turning pale; "you are joking, surely?"

"Not a bit of it."

"But you can save me, and you will, won't you?" he whined.

"That depends on circumstances; tell me without reservation everything you know about the murder of my father, and what became of his property; your life hangs on your answers; attempt to deceive me, and you die."

For a few moments Alston remained silent, as if dumfounded, then he stammered out:

"Croley—Croley murdered him; I found it out after he left the country, and I also got possession of your property, and have it all



Holding on to the horse's tail with one hand, Captain Helm emptied the contents of one of the revolvers at the ferocious beast.

was directed to her, Croley recovered from the stunning effect of the blow which he had received, arose stealthily to his feet, knocked one of the men down, and grappled with the other before he could use his weapons.

The Sikh would soon have been overpowered, but the prospect of being once more in Croley's power inspired Flora with desperate courage, and she took a hand in the combat.

She sprang behind Croley, threw a shawl over his head, drew it tight, and thus in some measure disabled him.

This gave the Sikh who was knocked down partly stunned time to regain his feet, and he sprang to the assistance of his comrade.

Before Croley could get the shawl off his head, he received a number of disabling blows, but it required a desperate struggle to overpower and secure him.

During the struggle Croley several times shouted for his men, and Flora, fearing that some of the robbers might come to his assistance, took the key to the secret chamber from his girdle, where he always kept it, and had him carried here.

These facts were related partly by two Sikhs and partly by Flora, and in conclusion, she said to Tom:

"When I secured the key, I also took possession of a piece of property that belongs to

Making a motion to Hamet to put up his sword, Tom turned his attention to the suppliant, and on getting a view of his face, started as if he had received an electric shock.

The man groveling on the floor before him was his uncle, William Alston.

"Why, how in the world did you come here?" Tom asked, as soon as he had in some degree recovered from his amazement.

"They found me hiding in a closet, and would have killed me if I had not run for my life," answered the trembling wretch.

"That is not what I asked about; I want to know how you happened to be in India, and among robbers."

Tom's voice sounded familiar, and Alston looking up, now recognized him, and from a state of abject terror, passed into the opposite extreme.

"Ha—ha!" he cried. "Tom, is it you, is it? Hurrah! I'm safe—I'm safe!"

"Yes, it is me," replied Tom, dryly, "and I wish you to answer my questions."

"Certainly—certainly. I was landing some arms, my ship left me, and I had to stay with Croley or be murdered."

"Been selling arms to the Sepoys, have you? The penalty is death."

safe at home for you—you will have quite a nice fortune when we get back."

"Liar and coward! Die!" roared Croley—who had managed to get his right arm loose—jerking a heavy dagger out of a Sikh's belt and hurling it at Alston.

The deadly weapon flashed through the air straight as an arrow, and buried itself up to the hilt in the back of Alston, who fell forward on his face as if stricken by lightning.

Croley was quickly overpowered and securely bound, but he had completely lost control of his temper and raved like a madman.

"Yes," he yelled, glaring at Tom, "I did kill your father. I hated him when we were boys, for he excelled me in everything."

"We grew to manhood and loved the same woman; he won her, and hating him more than ever, I fought him and he put out one of my eyes."

"It was a fair fight, and as our paths lay far apart for some years afterwards, my hate slept, but did not die out."

"In an evil hour William Alston came to me, and said: 'Late to-morrow afternoon, I am to receive some money from Robert Topp, and give him a mortgage on my real-estate; if you will put him out of the way, and get me the papers before they are recorded, I will

give you two thousand dollars, and you will also find something worth taking in his office.' I jumped at the chance to fill my empty pockets and revenge myself at the same time.

"I called on your father—who bore no malice—and after inquiring about some ships he had to charter, told him that if he would be at his office at six o'clock the next afternoon, I would take one of them; he said he would remain to accommodate me, though it was after office hours.

"I was on hand at the hour appointed, and while he was making out the charter of a vessel, struck him from behind with a belaying pin, and repeated the blow until he was dead.

"I then took his watch, pocketbook and everything of value in the office, including Alston's mortgage, and waiting until everything was quiet in the streets, escaped from the building through one of the windows.

"That same night I delivered the mortgage—which was stained with your father's blood—to William Alston, and received the promised reward; he offered to give the same amount if I would kill you, but I declined.

"When I saw you on the Comet I thought that Alston had betrayed me, and acted accordingly; if he had kept his mouth shut to-night, he would now have been alive, and I would have kept silent; but as it is, he has met with his just deserts, and you can do with me as you will."

For some seconds after the fiendish story was finished, there was profound silence.

Tom's face was pallid with the pallor that indicates alike great joy and sorrow, and there was a look in his eyes that made Croley shiver in spite of himself.

"Gag him," Tom at length said in a low voice, "and when the morning comes he shall die."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GUIDE—DEATH OF ALSTON—CROLEY IS ANNIHILATED—TOM MARRIES—CONCLUSION.

WHEN the Sikhs were about to remove the dead guide, Flora discovered that it was Croley's Hindoo wife in male attire.

Death-like as William Alston looked, an examination revealed the fact that he was not dead.

He was placed on a couch, the dagger drawn out of his back, where it had remained sticking, and his wound bandaged.

He revived sufficiently to swallow a little brandy, but did not speak, and almost immediately relapsed into insensibility.

Leaving Hamet and several of the Sikhs to watch by Alston's side and to guard Croley, Tom and Phil, after ascertaining that the wounded man had been carefully cared for and sentinels posted, retired to another room with Flora, partook of some refreshments and talked over what had happened since they parted.

The chain of circumstances which led to Croley's being in command of a band of robbers, and having Flora Kelly, William Alston and Bajee Rao with him, was as follows:

In the letter which he substituted for the one written by Bajee Rao, Croley expressed a desire to have Flora Kelly for a wife if Nina Sahib did not fancy her; and spoke in glowing terms of the cargo of arms which he was having brought to the country for the use of the Sepoys.

This letter, it will be remembered, was sent with Flora to Nina Sahib, and as before stated, saved his life.

For Nina Sahib hated the English so bitterly, that he was disposed to put him to death; but wishing to secure the arms, and also the services of Croley, determined to give her to him.

On arriving at Cawnpore, after escaping from their pursuers, Croley and Bajee Rao were informed by Nina Sahib of his wishes and intentions.

Croley was delighted; and being provided with money to pay for the arms, wagons for their transportation, and an escort, departed for a circuitous route for the sea-coast.

Bajee Rao was not only angry at being outwitted, but was by no means pleased at the turn things had taken, as he wanted the arms for the King of Oude; but he stood too much in dread of Nina Sahib to complain, and as Croley thought it politic to promise him a share of the profits, pretended to be satisfied.

He left Cawnpore with Croley, but after trying in vain to get his money at once, parted company with him, and proceeded to Lucknow.

Croley with his escort, reached without accident, the point on the coast that he had designated in the letter sent to William Alston at Pondicherry, and the next day the expected vessel appeared.

Signals, formerly agreed upon, were exchanged, and Alston came ashore in a boat.

Delays were dangerous, so scant time was spent in greetings, before Croley and Alston withdrew to one side, where they could talk without being overheard.

Of course their bargaining was the merest pretense; Nina Sahib had sent down by the escort two lacs of rupees—a sum equivalent to about one hundred thousand dollars—and Alston being prompted by Croley, demanded the whole amount, for the arms which he had brought.

This demand was acceded to, and the money sent on board of the Orion, Alston's vessel, he remaining on shore as a hostage for the delivery of the arms.

This arrangement was made because neither Croley nor Alston were willing to trust to the good faith of the other.

With the money, Alston sent an order to the captain of the Orion, to lower all of the ship's boats, and land the arms as quick as possible, and to send back with the last boat one quarter of the money in an arm-chest directed to Croley.

By this means, Croley expected to conceal from Nina Sahib's officers, that fact that he had received any of the money.

Everything went on smoothly until the boats had returned to the ship for the last of the arms, when a British cruiser hove in sight.

The captain of the Orion, knowing the dangerous nature of the business he was engaged in, at once hoisted in the boats and sailed away, leaving Alston on shore.

After Alston purchased the arms to carry to India, he found it impossible to charter a vessel for such a risky expedition, and he bought the Orion, intending to dispose of it on his return.

Nearly every cent he had in the world was invested in the vessel and cargo, and the prospect of losing them both, and the dangerous position in which he was left, made him perfectly frantic.

Croley, however, knowing that his chance of getting a share of the money paid for the arms depended on Alston's preservation, assured him of safety.

Alston's life would not have been worth a moment's purchase if he had tried to make his way through the country alone, so, in a most deplorable state of mind, he put on a Sepoy uniform, and accompanied Croley on his return to the headquarters of Nina Sahib.

Nina Sahib was found at a place called Futtehpore Chowrassee, and in a very savage and cross condition indeed.

For during Croley's absence he had been defeated in several battles and his palace at Blithoor burned.

His men, too, were deserting in large numbers, and, deeming it unsafe to remain in striking distance of the British, Nina Sahib was making preparations to retreat to the western portion of the country.

Bajee Rao had returned to Nina Sahib's headquarters, and brought Croley's Hindoo wife with him from Lucknow.

By this means Bajee Rao fully paid Croley for the trick he had played about the letter.

Croley would almost as soon have met the devil as his deserted wife, but felt that his position with the natives was too ticklish to run the risk of discarding her now that she had rejoined him.

Before Nina Sahib had completed his preparations to march he learned that the British were advancing against him.

The march of a Hindoo army is always disorderly, but the retreat of Nina Sahib's forces—which at once commenced—was like the flight of a panic-stricken mob.

Desertion was the order of the day, and night, too, for that matter, and whole regiments melted away like snow in the sun.

Croley and Bajee Rao determined to leave the sinking ship and not to go empty handed.

Securing the services of about a hundred desperadoes, they took advantage of the confusion of a night march to carry off the wagons that contained most of Nina Sahib's

treasure and the palanquin in which Flora Kelly was traveling.

When the robbery was discovered next morning, Croley and his companions were far enough to be safe from pursuit, and in less than twenty-four hours were established on the Devil's Island, a place which Bajee Rao was well acquainted with.

Croley took William Alston with him, and his wife stuck with him and went along also.

But Croley at once set himself to work to get rid of her, and abused the poor creature—whose only crime was in clinging to him—so shamefully, that she begged him to give her a suit of men's clothes so that she could travel in safety, and she would annoy him no longer.

To this Croley agreed, but fearing that she might betray him, instructed the men who were ordered to row her ashore to put her to death.

This she learned when in the boat, and on landing fled for her life, and was saved by Tom and Phil.

Eager for revenge, she gladly guided Tom and his men to the island, and enraged beyond endurance by hearing Croley speak of her as an "old hag," attacked him, and met her death at his hands.

The night that Flora was rescued by Tom was the first time since she was carried on the island that Croley had threatened to force her into a marriage.

The reason can be told in a very few words. He had acquired a fortune by his robberies, and was anxious to get out of the country, but the seaports were all in the hands of the British, and he thought that if he could induce Flora to wed him willingly, she might secure his safety by saying he had rescued her from Nina Sahib.

We will now resume the thread of the narrative.

About daylight the morning after he was wounded, William Alston regained his consciousness, and asked to see Tom.

Alston's life was ebbing fast. He insisted on Tom's drawing up a paper transferring all of the former's property to the latter, signed it, and confessed that Croley had told the truth about him, and almost instantly expired.

Shortly after sunrise, Tom went out to make arrangements for the execution of Croley.

Hamet, who had gone out earlier, knowing Tom's purpose, led him to where there was a strange and fearful instrument of execution.

It was a machine like an ordinary pile-driver, but on an enormous scale, and of tremendous strength.

Instead of the ordinary weight, there was a box, each side of which was fifteen feet square, constructed of solid timbers, braced with iron rods.

The outside of the bottom of the box was covered with wrought iron two inches thick. The interior was filled with granite.

Immediately under this enormous mass a corresponding surface of the solid rock had been leveled and covered with a plate of iron.

Tom did not know what the machine was intended for until J. Hamet had explained, and said that he had seen several men executed with one of a similar kind at Delhi, and that the bodies of the victims were spread out like a sheet of paste-board, and were afterwards dried and hung up on a wall to serve as a warning to others.

Tom had been wishing for some terrible mode of putting Croley to death, and here was the instrument ready to his hand.

He ordered Hamet to muster his men, raise the weight, and then bring out Croley.

It required the united strength of fifty sikhs to hoist up the immense mass, and then it hung thirty feet in the air, and was so arranged that one man, by simply moving a lever, could let it drop.

One of the guard had removed the gag from Croley's mouth to give him some water and neglected to replace it, so when he was brought out his tongue was at liberty.

When he saw how he was to be executed, all his hardihood deserted him, huge drops of perspiration stood on his face, and he shrieked and begged for mercy.

But Tom was inexorable; only once did he speak, and that was after the trembling wretch was laid under the weight, then seizing the lever, he said:

"John Croley, if you had a thousand lives I would take them thus."

As the last word was uttered Tom moved the lever, the enormous weight shot down—

ward like lightning, striking with a shock that made the very earth tremble, the machine was enveloped in a crimson mist that squirted out from under the edges of the iron-bound box and Croley was annihilated.

The woodwork of this fearful invention of Eastern despotism was then set on fire and burned, but the mass of granite was left as a fitting monument for the villain whose mangled remains lay beneath it.

After this matter was disposed of the Sikhs collected wood and burned the bodies of their slain companions, but the dead robbers were hurled over the cliff into the river to feed the crocodiles.

Then commenced the more agreeable task of collecting and examining the spoils of the robbers' stronghold.

There were magnificent garments embroidered with gold and precious stones, swords and daggers, whose hilts and scabbards were crusted with jewels, saddles of velvet stiff with gold, housings and counterments full of gems, shawls of the finest texture and richest of colors, and enough gold and silver utensils and coin to make every man in the command rich beyond his most sanguine expectations.

But the richest prize of all was what Flora pointed out to Tom and Phil. She led them to the small room in which she had taken refuge during the fight, and showed them, cunningly concealed in the wall, a square steel box about eighteen inches long. It was Nina Sahib's jewel box, and was filled with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls and other precious stones, some set in barbaric style and others not even polished.

Tom would have turned it into the general stock, but the Sikhs, for once in their lives, had as much plunder as they wanted, and swore to a man that the jewel box and contents should belong to him, Phil and Flora.

In the cave at the foot of the subterranean stairway, there was found a number of boats belonging to the robbers, and an arched passage leading to an underground stable, in which there were over a hundred fine horses.

The horses were sent ashore by swimming, which they seemed accustomed to, and the men who were left with the company's horses at the camp, directed to take all the animals to Cawnpore by land, while Tom and Phil, with the rest of the men, went down the river in boats loaded with treasure, and reached the city before dark.

Leaving Phil to attend to the valuables, Tom at once hurried to Colonel Kelly's quarters with Flora.

The front door stood open, and they entered without knocking.

Tom had suggested that Flora should remain in the passage while he broke the news of her rescue to her father.

But this little plan was not carried out, for Flora, through a door which was standing

ajar, saw Colonel Kelly with his soldierly form bowed and bent and a look of settled melancholy on his face, and could not restrain herself; in another instant she was in the room.

"Father—father!"

"My child—my child!" were the exclamations that simultaneously burst from their overflowing hearts, and Flora was locked in her father's arms.

The scene was too sacred for the eye of a third person, so Tom silently withdrew, and gladdened the heart of Captain Helm by telling him what had happened.

After a while the colonel sent up to Captain Helm's room for Tom, and when he went down, overwhelmed him with praise and thanks, and insisted that Tom should mention something that he wanted, or wanted done.

Now, Tom knew very well what he wanted, and what he wished the colonel to do, but it was some time before he could muster up enough courage to stammer out:

"Colonel, I love your—" and then he stuck fast, and could not utter another word.

"Love my what?" asked the colonel, after waiting a reasonable time for Tom to finish the sentence.

Flora, with womanly instinct, divined what was coming, her long lashes nearly veiled her eyes, and the blood surged in a crimson flood over her neck and face up to the roots of her hair.

Encouraged by a glance he got of her, Tom, in straight, soldierly fashion, told his love, and told it well, for there is true pathos in deep feeling, and an eloquence in truth which art in vain seeks to imitate.

And the plain, unvarnished statement of Tom Topp, who, but little more than a boy in years, his hearers knew had a man's heart and was as brave as a lion and as true as steel, went straight to their hearts.

"This is a matter that Flora must decide," said the colonel. "What say you, my child?"

Flora's little hand shyly stole into Tom's and rested there confidently, and hiding her face upon her father's breast, she murmured:

"You know you were always wishing for a son."

"And if I searched the whole world through I could not find a nobler one," said the colonel warmly. "But, Tom, you will have to marry both of us, for I cannot be parted from my girl."

"Our happiness would not be complete if you did not share it," replied Tom, wringing the colonel's hand.

The next day Tom and Phil parted from their company of Sikhs, who expressed great sorrow at their leaving, and by their advice elected Hamet captain of the company.

The same afternoon Colonel Kelly, Captain Helm, Flora and the two boys embarked on a

government steamer, taking with their other valuables Thunderbolt, Banshee and twelve of the best horses captured from the robbers, and in due time arrived safely in Calcutta.

Now that fortune had begun to smile on Tom, it seemed as if he was to have nothing but good luck, for at Calcutta he found the Orion and the one hundred thousand dollars paid for the arms, in the hands of the government officials; the captain and crew had smuggled themselves on board other vessels and departed for parts unknown, and as there was no positive proof against the vessel, Tom proved his right to the ship and money, and they were handed over to him.

Tom immediately presented the ship and fifty thousand dollars to Captain Helm, and Phil also gave him an equal amount of money.

During the time necessary to ship a crew, and supply the Orion with stores for the homeward trip, Colonel Kelly made the necessary arrangements to transfer his fortune to America, and Tom and Flora were married.

While in Calcutta Tom and his companions were the lions of the place, and were flattered and caressed by everyone, from the governor-general down.

At length everything was ready, and the Orion, with Tom and his wife and friends on board, sailed for America, and after a pleasant voyage arrived at New York.

Tom at once bought a fine residence near the park, and went to housekeeping; Colonel Kelly of course lives with him, and so does Phil about half the time; the rest of his time he spends in sailing with Captain Helm, who, though he is not in easy circumstances, says that he will stick to his ship for a few years longer.

One of the first places that Tom visited after reaching New York was William Alston's residence on West Twelfth street.

In the safe he found an agreement, which proved beyond doubt that Moses Levy had been bribed to have him convicted for passing counterfeit money.

Moses Levy, however, was beyond Tom's reach; he having been found guilty of manufacturing bogus money, and died in Sing Sing Penitentiary.

After examining this new proof of William Alston's villany, and the blood-stained papers for whose possession his father was murdered, Tom bundled them up together and thrust them into the fire which was burning in the grate.

"What is that you are burning up?" asked Flora, who was with him.

"At the sound of her voice, Tom, who had been gazing at the blazing papers, turned, and answered:

"Proofs, that here, as well as in India, I have been fighting against fiends."

[THE END.]

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